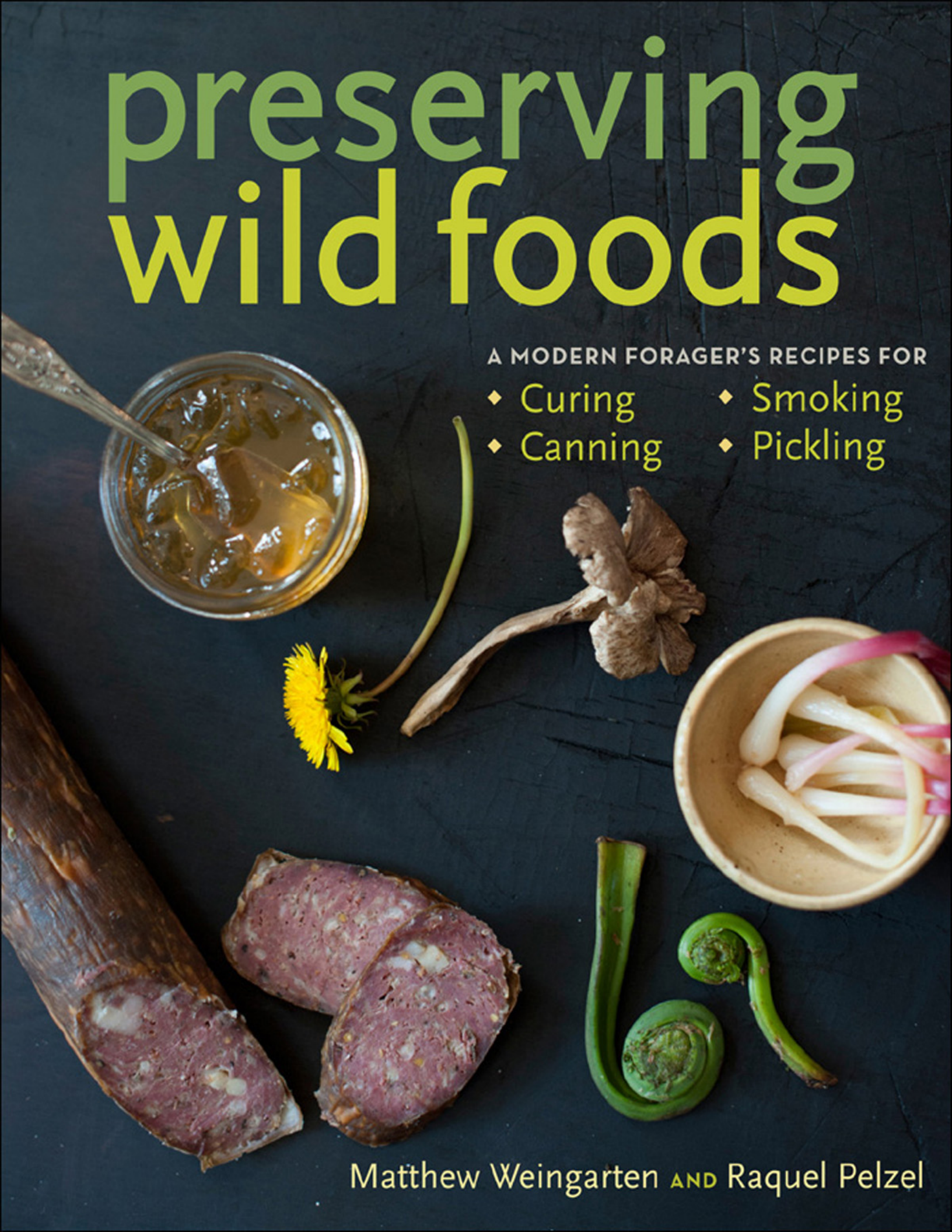
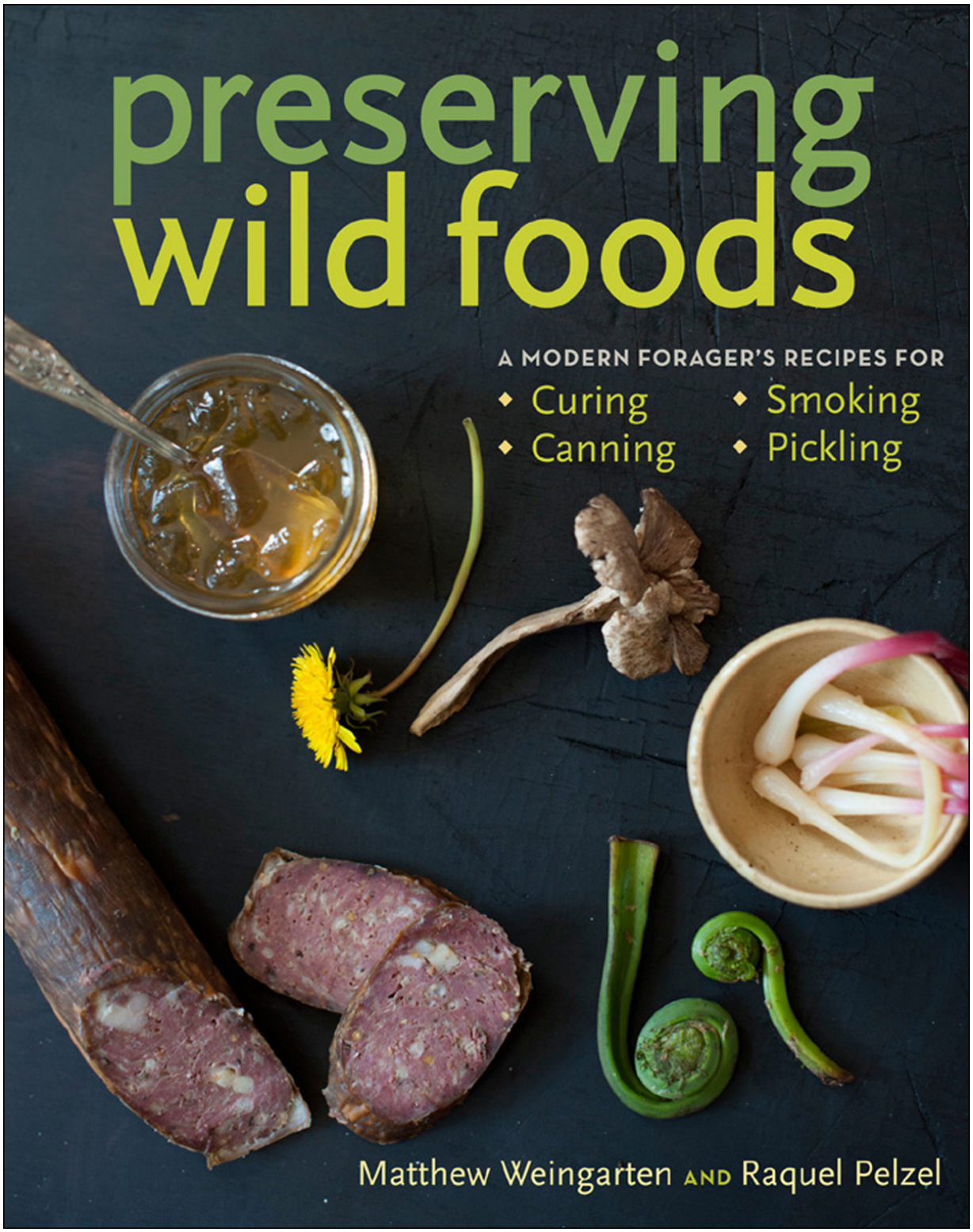
preserving wild foods

A MODERN FORAGER'S RECIPES FOR

- Curing
- Canning
- Smoking
- Pickling



Matthew Weingarten AND Raquel Pelzel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Matthew Weingarten *and* Raquel Pelzel

photography by Stéphanie de Rougé

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To my daughter, Sarah Zlatka, who dreams along with me through the wilds and to my wife, Katka, who somehow is still enamored of all our larking.

— *MW*

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PREFACE

I AM ENAMORED OF THE NATURAL WORLD. Beyond cooking, I like to be a part of the harvest and dream of what to do with the glorious produce, seafood, meat, or whatever else it is I am collecting. Even in densely populated urban environments such as New York City, where I live, it’s possible to have a strong connection to the wilds where food comes from.

I find chamomile growing in sidewalk cracks, mulberry tree limbs hanging heavy with ripe fruit, ginkgo nuts in front of million-dollar town houses and in rough-and-tumble public parks, and lonely quince trees holding ground in front of new developments. I get so much satisfaction from taking the bounty and preserving it to enjoy later. How nice it is to go into my pantry before I begin making dinner for my family and find inspiration in a jar of pickled mushrooms or anchovies cured with garlic and olive oil. Then, when I think about using my collected bounty in a dish, I'm contemplating not only the flavors and which cooking methods to apply, but also the natural landscape from which the ingredients were taken. When harvesting food in this manner, it's important to keep responsible stewardship in mind. As much as I am tempted to gather everything I find, the anticipation and hope for plentiful seasons to come remind me to not deplete a source beyond its ability to bear again next cycle. Take some, give some, leave some: it's all a part of mindful foraging.

Because I live in New York City and not in a cabin in the woods, the Union Square Greenmarket is usually where I find inspiration and the raw resources for my restaurant's menu. When I'm trolling the Greenmarket for treasures, I'm most often seduced by what others walk past, such as "wild hearts of palm" (otherwise known as cattails), a basket of angelica, or off-parts, such as the offal, heads, and bones that farmers have tucked away in coolers. I wear my excitement on my sleeve, and the farmer usually succeeds in selling me way more than I can possibly use. My solution is to preserve and to cure, to put up the bountiful now to enjoy with thrift later.

I didn't grow up with a pickling and preserving tradition; that came later in life. I was most influenced by my wife and her family from Slovakia. They eat compotes with certain kinds of meat and pickles with others, and a walk through the woods to forage for the ingredients for these treats is, depending on the season, part of their weekly, if not daily, routine. Routine, but never mundane: there's always a certain amount of ceremony to the anticipation and excitement of twisting a lid off a jar of preserved sloe plums or slicing up a link of homemade kielbasa. It is truly a celebration of seasonal food.

These occasions of wonder and joy have become a part of my tradition at home, providing context and meaning to the seasons. What could be more appetizing in the middle of February than frying up a chicken and serving it with a peach compote, or slathering a piece of hearty black bread with rose hip jam? Plan ahead by taking advantage of the season and capturing its essence, and later you'll have the unexpected joy that comes from the spur-of-the-moment decision to pull out your last jar of homemade maraschino cherries to serve on top of a hot fudge sundae.

My fascination with curing and preserving was preceded by a love of food and its connection to our natural year. I went to Ohio University in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, where the farmland rolls along in gentle waves. During my junior year, some friends and I moved to a farmhouse about 20 miles out of town. It had a beautiful garden plot and a grape arbor. I was an English major and spent my days reading, writing papers, and cooking feasts for the whole house. I dabbled in wild yeast starters and got geeky-happy baking my natural-starter loaves.

Simultaneously, I fell in love with old herbal texts and began to see the world in a new light. So many remedies lurk in our landscapes, and so much beauty lies in the folk traditions of the herbal apothecary. I fell in love with the idea of food as medicine, and my favorite class became a science lab that focused on the medicinal foods of the southeastern Ohio valley. I vividly recall walking through the woods with this crazy-hippie professor — he'd do things like grab a big bunch of poison ivy, rub it all over his body, and then grab jewelweed (the natural remedy against poison ivy) and rub it wherever he'd put the poison ivy. Jewelweed is filled with an aloelike jelly, and after coating himself with the sticky nectar, he never did get that unsightly rash and fearsome itch. One of the course's suggested readings was Euell Gibbons's *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, which is about foraging and using the resources that naturally grow in abundance all around us. It floored me, and I've never looked at the natural world the same way since.

The following winter, I did what all seniors do: wonder what the hell I was going to do with my life after college. I was taking a roast out of the oven when it hit me: I was happiest in the kitchen, cooking. My plan became to go to culinary school in New York City and live for a year in the country's

culinary capital. I wanted to learn to cook in a great restaurant and then open my own small auberge in the countryside. But the vitality of New York City captured me, and fifteen years later, I'm still here.

I graduated from Peter Kump's (now the Institute of Culinary Education/ICE) and staged at Larry Forgione's American Place, the best spot I could have landed, and perhaps the most influential American restaurant in the mid-1990s. I chose it because it had an amazing culinary reputation, but it wasn't until I got into the kitchen that I realized what a great match it was for my style and all of the nascent ideas I had about food, harvesting, and honoring tradition and culture.

Larry was a font of stories and my first real culinary mentor. The research he brought to the kitchen regarding historical recipes and traditions and the partnerships he forged with local farmers and growers are foundations I call upon daily in my own restaurant kitchen. I stayed with Larry and his restaurants for three years and then went to Quilty's to work with Katy Sparks, followed by a stint at Tribeca Grill and then Porcupine. It wasn't until I worked alongside Peter Hoffman, at Savoy, however, that I truly felt at home. I knew how I wanted to cook, what I wanted to say, and finally I had found a simpatico kitchen where I could express myself. I worked with Peter for three years, and I'm indebted to him for expanding my knowledge of the hows and whys of food. Years later, our dialogue about the natural world continues, usually midmorning over a farmer's table at the Greenmarket.

When it was time for me to move on, I accepted an incredible offer to run the kitchen at Inside Park, the restaurant adjoining St. Bartholomew's Church, a historic landmark in Midtown. It was a space in which I could explore my growing fascination with the time-honored traditions of curing, pickling, and preserving. Inside Park is run by Sodexo, one of the largest food companies in the world, responsible for feeding hundreds of thousands of people on a daily basis. Working for Sodexo has expanded my knowledge of global food systems and our impact on the planet, and now, in my current role as a culinary director for the company, I find immense pleasure in extending my reach farther to make connections among the farms, people, traditions, and the foods we all partake of every day.

That’s my global perspective, but when I’m in my kitchen in New York City, I think of our microsystem here in the Northeast. I plan menus mindful of the season, with dishes inspired by the ebb and flow of urban surroundings, woodland, meadow, and seacoast. For example, when I find a plump, early-spring brook trout, as I think about how to serve it, I envision myself standing knee-deep in ripples of water with my fishing rod and satchel. I imagine what surrounds me — maybe cattails and fiddlehead ferns — and then I begin to picture the dish: fire-grilled trout, gently pickled cattails, and butter-sautéed fiddleheads.

Like the saying “What grows together goes together,” there’s a natural rhythm to the pairings. Fish from a brook served with greens and other plants that grow streamside makes sense on a plate and makes sense on the planet. I hope to capture this feeling in these pages, which is why I organized chapters according to natural environment: freshwater, saltwater, field, forest, and cultivated garden. Each setting offers a new journey. Through old-fashioned storytelling, a little history and lore, some cold, hard facts about preserving and curing, and my passion for these traditional folkways, I hope you’re enticed to go out into the world, pick something, and put it up in your cupboard. Enjoy not just the taste but also the memory of its discovery.

— MATT WEINGARTEN

PRESERVING & CURING: HOW & WHY

FOR MILLENNIA, PEOPLE HAVE BEEN pickling and preserving as a way to extend the harvest and provide food and comfort during the cold winter. Before there were the catchphrases “seasonal,” “locavore,” and “farm-to-table,” what these words describe was the everyday reality of survival.

Today, what with refrigeration and freezing as well as vacuum-sealing and industrial canning, preserving the bounty of the season isn't a necessity, but it sure is delicious and fun to do. In this book, I call on different methods to preserve food. I pickle, pack into jars and hot-water-process, cure with salt or oil, pickle with vinegar, smoke, and sometimes preserve in high-octane hooch. What follows is a brief tutorial into the hows and whys of each method. The rules are basic and the principles clear: Approach canning and preserving with joy and excitement, not trepidation and fear. (That said, there's nothing wrong with checking the playbook for a gameplan. For the most precise rundown of USDA guidelines for canning and curing, check out the National Center for Home Food Preservation at http://nchfp.uga.edu.)

The Methods

Boiling-water-bath processing. Fruits or vegetables are packed with liquid into sterilized jars. The jars are submerged in boiling water and held there to destroy any microorganisms and to expel air (necessary for microorganisms to live). The jars are removed from the water, and as they cool, the lids compress and create a vacuum seal, preserving the integrity of what is inside.

Salt curing. Salt curing involves coating a large piece of meat or fish with salt and spices to draw out moisture and eliminate an environment friendly to bacteria. *Note:* Some recipes call for part salt, part sugar, to achieve a more tender, less salty product.

Sugar curing. This method of preservation, which is used most often for fruits, also draws out moisture. The process is slightly different, however, in that the moisture (in the form of sugar syrup) is almost always reintroduced to the fruit. This gives a more intense and pure flavor in the finished preserve.

Oil curing. In oil curing, items *already cured* are covered with oil or natural animal fat to seal in flavor and create an impenetrable barrier against microbes, moisture, and air. This is a great technique to use for duck confit, fish, and vegetables. It is crucial that whatever you plan to submerge

in oil is thoroughly cured beforehand, as some forms of spoilage, specifically botulism, thrive in an anaerobic (airless) environment. (This explains health regulations dictating never to store raw garlic in oil: garlic is known to harbor the botulinum toxin.)

Pickling. This method of preservation involves packing raw, blanched, or cooked food into jars and covering the contents with an acidic salt solution. (Bacteria and molds don't grow in a high-acid environment.) Sometimes pickled foods are further heat-treated in the jars by processing in a boiling-water bath (see above), which extends their shelf life.

Smoking. Often used in conjunction with dry curing, smoking inhibits spoilage through dehydration and the creation of a smoke covering that consists of the natural oils of the wood as well as carbon. This combination creates a hostile environment for microbial growth.

Picking Fruits, Vegetables, and Proteins

Fruits and vegetables should be unblemished, meaning no bruises, soft spots, holes, or gashes. They should be as fresh as possible. Fruits and vegetables intended for pickling are best slightly underripe; and for jamming or preserving, they're best a hair overripe. Always wash and dry fruits and vegetables before using. Meat and seafood should also be as fresh as possible, preferably butchered on-site and at the moment of purchase. Try to purchase a whole fish and have the fishmonger fillet it for you before wrapping it up. The same applies to whole joints: If you don't plan to bone the muscle at home, ask the butcher to do it for you. The idea is that the more surface area exposed to air, the more likely it is that bacteria will latch on and grow. Limiting the exposure slows spoilage.

Extending Shelf Life

The preserving liquid, be it a sugar syrup or a brine, is naturally balanced by the processes of cooking and reducing or curing. Any introduction of foreign matter might contaminate the whole lot. Follow these measures, and your preserves and pickles will last a long time.

1. Make sure anything the food is going to come into contact with, such as knives, bowls, plates, cutting boards, hands, and all surfaces, is thoroughly clean. Hot soapy water is the tried-and-true method to accomplish this; you can also add vinegar andor bleach to the water.

2. Sterilize all equipment. Immerse glass jars in boiling water for 10 minutes or run them through the dishwasher. Keep them under hot water or in the dishwasher until you're ready to fill with the item to be preserved — hot glass ensures that a jar won't crack when you fill it with a hot liquid. Prepare lids according to the manufacturer's instructions.

3. After the food has been preserved, once you open a jar, the food within will last much longer if you don't introduce bacteria. Thus, when removing from a jar or crock anything preserved in brine or sugar syrup (sauerkraut, dill pickles, or maraschino cherries, for example), always use clean tongs, fork, or chopsticks.

Equipment for Boiling-Water-Bath Canning

You don't need much to start canning, but a few key tools will make the process easier, cleaner, and more enjoyable.

Mason jars. Get at least a half dozen in an assortment of sizes (half pint, pint, and quart are the most commonly used). You can reuse the jars after you empty the goodies inside, but buy new twist-on rings and lids for every canning session: they're what make the vacuum seal.

Large pot with well-fitting lid. Available at most hardware stores and many a tag sale, the one you want should have thin sides and a massive capacity. Whatever the size of the jars you'll be using, you must be able to cover them with at least 1 inch of water in the pot plus 1 inch of airspace between the top of the water and the lip of the pot (so the water doesn't boil over). Make sure the canning pot has a lid.

Canning rack. This rack fits inside the canning pot. Its function is to hold the jars safely in place so they don’t bump around and crack (or even worse, break) while in the boiling water.

Canning tongs. These rubber-lined tongs make removing boiling hot jars from the pot a cinch.

Lid wand. A plastic stick with a magnet at the end, a lid wand is used for retrieving lids and bands from the hot water after they have been cleaned or sterilized.

Funnel. This makes transferring hot fruit or liquid into a jar a simple and mess-free production.

Clean kitchen towel. Use to wipe the lip of a jar before securing its lid and band.

Digital scale. With this, weighing fruits and vegetables for exact measurements will be easy.

Food mill. A food mill is great for removing skins and seeds, and for giving a smooth consistency to fresh pulpy fruits.

Candy/jelly thermometer. Unlike a standard kitchen or meat thermometer, a candy thermometer is able to read very high temperatures.

Cheesecloth. You'll need this for making spice sachets and for lining a sieve before straining.

Permanent markers and labels. It's always wise to label your preserves: what you've got and when you made it.

Canning Step by Step

1. For canning jams, pickles, and other items to be stored in glass, fill clean jars, using a funnel. (It's a good idea to have one extra sterilized jar ready just in case you need it for an extra juicy or leggy batch of preserves or pickles.) Leave enough headspace in the jar so that you'll be able to boil the ingredients without them exploding. Follow these guidelines:

for vegetables, 1 inch of headspace

for fruits and tomatoes, ½ inch

for jams and jellies, ¼ inch

Clean the rim of the jars with a clean kitchen towel before covering with the lids. Fasten the lid and band.

Set up a hot-water bath and submerge the jars, placing them gently on the canning rack, and taking care to cover with at least 1 inch of water, at least 1 inch below the rim of the pot. Bring to a boil and boil for as long as recommended in the recipe.

2. When the processing is complete, use the canning tongs to transfer the hot jars to a kitchen towel–lined surface. Listen for the pops of the seals as the jars cool.

3. The next day, test the seal by pressing on the center of each lid. It shouldn't bounce back. (If it does, the jar wasn't properly sealed. Simply put that jar in the fridge and use right away.)

4. Store in a cool, dark, dry place, preferably between 50°F and 70°F, for up to a year. Although preserves are often fine beyond a year, their flavor, texture, and nutritional value may be compromised. Besides, after a year, the cycle begins again with a fresh batch of produce.

A Few Notes Regarding Other Methods of Preserving

Other methods of curing are fairly straightforward. Here are some points to keep in mind when salt curing, sugar curing, and smoking.

Salt curing. Always use a nonreactive vessel, such as a stainless-steel pot, food-grade plastic, or a ceramic crock. Salt not only pulls moisture from food, but it also extracts soft metal from pans, and that's why aluminum pans are frowned upon. The taste of metal in your lovingly made preserves is highly undesirable, not to mention unhealthy. Salt curing will produce a dehydrated product that sits in a pool of its released juices. With some exceptions, you'll be discarding the salt solution. The exceptions? Sauerkraut juice (see page 121), a great immune system–boosting tonic, stays, as does the maceration liquid of garum (see page 44), which is, in fact, the product you're going for.

Sugar Curing. As with salt curing, use a nonreactive vessel (stainless steel, food-grade plastic, or ceramic). And just as salt does, sugar draws out moisture. (This explains why sweet drinks aren't thirst quenching!) Unlike with a salt cure, however, the sweet sugar syrup is usually cooked down and reintroduced as the final step in making a preserve.

Smoking. There are two methods for smoking food, and the only difference between them is the temperature at which the food is held.

A hot-smoked item usually starts from the raw state and enters a smoke chamber set at a temperature between 125°F to 350°F. With this method, the food becomes fully cooked and is ready to eat right after the smoking.

Cold smoking is a much gentler method and is used either to softly infuse with smoke flavor a food that will be consumed within a few days, or to flavor a food that has already undergone a curing process.

High Elevation

If your kitchen is at an elevation above 1,000 feet, you must adjust the time for boiling-water processing of preserves:

1,001–3,000 feet increase processing time by 5 minutes

3,001–6,000 feet increase processing time by 10 minutes

6,001–8,000 feet increase processing time by 15 minutes

8,001–10,000 feet increase processing time by 20 minutes

In both methods, the word *smudge* describes the amount of smoke in the chamber, how aggressive the smoked flavor is, and the vibrancy of color at the end. You can control the smudge by two methods: by adding more damp wood chips or pellets to the fire or by regulating the baffle (vent) to the chamber to increase or decrease the amount of smoke filling the chamber.

Equipment for Smoking

Meat thermometer to determine when meats and fish are done.

Rack for putting meats and fish inside the curing chamber.

Smoke sticks for threading whole fish so they can be suspended in a smoke chamber (or over a live fire) or elevated horizontally over a pan in a smoker. Also useful for fitting lots of sausages in a smoker, way more than with meat hooks; hot dogs are traditionally smoked with smoke sticks.

Smoking chamber, where you'll smoke the food. From an old-fashioned stone smoke-house or shed in which you build a small fire in the center

of the room and allow the smoke to build up, to a large cabinet-size box with digital controls to release wood pellets onto a hot plate, to a more primitive barrel-shaped grill model fueled by indirect live fire, a range of smoking chambers get the job done. It’s a matter of how much control appeals to you.

Stainless-steel meat hooks to hang from a rack or smoke stick to elevate fish, joints of meat, and sausages, so that air can freely circulate around them to promote an even cure, drying period, or smoking.

Twine to hang the meats and fish.

Wood to make the fire and smoke. Usually a combination of fruitwood, such as apple and peach, for example, and hardwood, such as oak and ash.

NOTE: *For some suppliers of specialty equipment, see Resources (see page 247).*

1 COASTLINE: GIFTS FROM THE SEA

OCEANS ARE THE ORIGINAL FORAGING GROUNDS and perhaps the last frontier for truly wild food. It takes very little effort to take a net, throw it in the water, and pull out whatever tasty bits live just beneath the surface. Standing at the edge of lapping waves and confronted by a seemingly never-ending horizon, I’m awestruck by the infinite possibilities.

Going back to ancient times, a port's strength was the result of its access to the ocean: for defense, for trade, and for sustenance. Most people today focus on fresh fish; however, curing, salting, smoking, and drying seafood — including sea vegetables such as kelp, moss, and sea beans — once enabled civilizations to exist and empires to expand.

Figuring out ways to preserve a big haul for leaner times, as well as for transport and trade, was critical. Edibles from the sea are highly perishable; I imagine the first salt curing happened when someone pulled a cod from the sea, gutted and scaled it, dipped it back into the ocean to get a nice salty coating, and then left it to dry in the sun. This is one of the most basic and simplest methods of curing (and also one of the best).

Whenever I cure food from the sea, I'm reminded of the link between ancient civilizations and us, a connection that goes back to the dawn of man. We've managed to explore the skies, to send cameras to distant galaxies, but close to home, our own oceans and seas remain a mystery. Who knows how many species are yet to be discovered among underwater mountain ranges and huge coral metropolises?

The vastness of the ocean, the rhythm of its waves and how they echo the ebb and flow of life, its rich and teeming ecology, its connection to the moon: it all gives me pause.

Every year I try to get to a warm place in the winter, a place where I can put on a mask and fins and dive deep into the sea. Losing myself underwater, without gravity and sound, is as close to perfection as I can imagine. All the elements that existed to bring forth life are still elementally in this landscape, this primordial soup. The ocean is the source of life on this planet, making it all the more important that we use its resources responsibly and respect the wisdom that exists within its waters.

Arctic Char

ARCTIC CHAR IS A MOSTLY FARMED COLD-WATER FISH with a mild, sweet flavor reminiscent of its cousin the salmon. It's smaller than a salmon, but its cool habitat ensures that its meat is still full of rich fat that is especially

well suited to a good cure (cure a lean piece of fish such as cod and you end up with hardtack: brittle, chewy, and inedible without special handling).

With the ocean's welfare in mind, I developed this recipe for Arctic Char Gravlax because there are steadily fewer good salmon to buy in markets. Arctic char is a great, sustainable choice that is often also quite a bit more economical than wild line-caught salmon from a local fishmonger. However, if you have the good fortune of being able to fish in the Northwest and catch one, by all means use salmon in this recipe instead.

What makes this recipe special is wild fennel pollen, which imparts a licorice-anise flavor that's a nice change from an all-dill gravlax. Wild fennel grows rampant across most parts of the country, but particularly along the West Coast, where it seems as if Highway 1 is lined with the plant's golden umbels. It's thought that Italian immigrants who settled in San Francisco brought the wild fennel seeds with them, and like wildfire, these wonderfully aromatic weeds spread along the coast.

Harvesting Wild Fennel Pollen

Harvesting wild fennel pollen is easy. To collect it, simply cut off the stalks and bright yellow heads from the lower portion of the plants and bring them home (snap off a stick to chew on — it's like an all-natural licorice rope!). The tops from about 20 or so plants will give you enough pollen to fill a standard-size tin of shoe polish — about ½ cup. Carefully place the tops upside down in a brown-paper lunch bag. Secure the bag with some kitchen twine or tape and hang in a cool and dry spot: the basement or a closet is ideal.

After 2 weeks, occasionally and gently shake the bag to help the pollen fall. After another 2 weeks, carefully shake the bag a few more times and

then remove the stalks. Do not throw out the dried stalks; these can be put directly on the cured char if the timing is right, or they will impart a wonderful aroma to any fire you're building to grill any other type of fish or a roast. Turn out the pollen into a coarse-mesh sieve set over a small bowl and rub the pollen against the sieve to separate it from any twigs, stamens, or flower bunches. Seal tightly in a small can or jar and save until ready to use.

Wild fennel pollen stays aromatic for about a year, after which you'll be ready to harvest some more.

Arctic Char Gravlax with Wild Fennel Pollen

MAKES 1 CURED FILLET

When curing fish, I use 2 parts sugar to 1 part salt. I like this ratio because it results in a softer and suppler fish than if salt were used alone. If you're not blessed with wild fennel in your landscape, it's available in specialty stores and markets. Don't be scared off by the price: a little goes a long way.

In a resealable quart-size plastic bag, place

1 tablespoon coriander seeds

1 tablespoon fennel seeds

Use a heavy-bottomed skillet to smash and crush the seeds. Transfer the seeds to a small bowl and stir in

½ cup packed light brown sugar

¼ cup kosher salt

Set on a cutting board

1 (1½-pound) arctic char fillet

Lay on the cutting board a piece of plastic wrap longer than the fish fillet. Spread about a third of the sugar-spice mixture on top of the plastic wrap.

Place the fillet on top, skin-side down, and cover with the remaining sugar-spice mixture. On top of the fillet, place

- **½ red onion, sliced into thin rings**

Lay a piece of plastic wrap over the top of the fish and then wrap the fillet in five tight layers of plastic wrap. Set the tightly wrapped fish on a rimmed sheet pan and set another sheet pan or long baking dish on top. Weight the baking sheet with four cans of beans, or anything heavy you have around.

Refrigerate the weighed-down fillet, flipping it once after 24 hours and again after another 12 hours, for a total of 48 hours.

DAY 3

Remove the sheet pan from the refrigerator and unwrap the fish. Wipe off the onions and as much of the spice-sugar mixture as possible. Sprinkle and then pat onto the top of the cured fillet

- **1 tablespoon wild fennel pollen**

Slice thin on the bias and serve chilled.

Cod

A FEW SUMMERS AGO, I was working in a restaurant with a typical New York City kitchen, including a walk-in refrigerator in the cellar of an old building notorious for electrical and plumbing problems. The Fourth of July fell on a Monday, and we decided to close the restaurant for a nice three-day weekend. We went through as much produce and as many of the perishables as possible during our Friday-night dinner, but we ended up with a few pounds of gorgeous fresh cod left unordered. Knowing I couldn’t keep it through the weekend, I decided to make salt cod so that it wouldn’t go to waste. At the end of the night, I put the fish in the walk-in along with everything else.

We showed up on Tuesday morning, and the second we opened the door, we knew the refrigerator had gone down. It was at least 120 degrees in that basement and we lost everything — every piece of fruit, every vegetable. Gone. The only food that survived was the salt cod and the sauerkraut (see page 121). I went on a month-long tirade about the failure of modern refrigeration, ranting that I wanted to work in a kitchen with no refrigeration at all. Really, that's how things were when our mothers' grandmothers did the cooking.

Salt cod goes back about five hundred years to Portuguese mariners and the Vikings. Some people believe that the Americas were discovered before Columbus's time and kept secret as a cod-fishing spot by Basque fishermen who were bringing back to Europe great hauls to feed God-fearing Catholics forbidden by the Church to eat meat but allowed to eat "cold" meat from the sea. Sailors followed the cod migration until they went so far out to sea that they couldn't bring the fish back to land without it spoiling. So they salted it. They'd catch the fish, clean them, dip them in saltwater and lay the fish on beaches along Canadian and American shores. The cod were left to dry until the boats returned, months later.

Nowadays, cod is harder to come by. Actually, cod is still readily available, but sustainable cod — that is, line caught — is really the only ethical choice. Cod that isn't line caught is trolled for and captured by big fishing boats that indiscriminately cast a wide net and drag it along the ocean floor, pulling up thousands of species along with the cod.

When cod fisheries collapsed, they did so over a century or two, though it seemed as if it happened overnight. The trade in salt cod, coupled with the increased popularity and access to fresh cod, decimated the population. One day the oceans were teeming with the fish, the next day they weren't, and fishermen were returning to shore with empty nets (and later, empty pockets). Stocks were severely depleted in the 1990s and supermarkets began popularizing the term "day-boat cod." This means that a small boat went out on a short journey, caught some cod, and came back that night — it was out for one day. When a big cod ship goes out to sea, it is on the water for at least seven to ten days, catching fish all the while.

My old boss used to say, “There are good fish to buy and good fisherman to buy from.” Usually, if you support a fisherman with a small boat, that operation will be fishing in a sustainable manner regardless of what it is pulling from the ocean (even fish that have been redlined by the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch). While it’s becoming harder and harder to find a fish not on the avoid list, the best way to understand where your fish is coming from is to seek out sources and shops that support local fishermen. Invariably this leads to the employment of sustainable methods, such as line catching (rather than trolling) and the use of small fishing vessels (as opposed to fleets). A small boat can only pull so many fish from the ocean. Look for fishmongers who can tell you what vessel and captain is landing the fish.

Salt Cod

MAKES 1 POUND SALT COD

Start with the freshest cod you can find, preferably from your own catch. If that’s not possible, try to buy from a fishmonger who deals with fishermen who care about sustainability. The recipe can be halved, quartered, even doubled. The general proportions are applicable to hake, haddock, and pollack, for example, as well as for cod: for every pound of fish, use half a pound of kosher salt. Once you have your salt cod, try the Salt Cod Fritters with Spicy Rum Sauce (see page 38).

Into a large, deep casserole dish pour

¼ pound kosher salt

On top of the salt, arrange

1 small side of cod (about 2 pounds)

Cover the cod fillet with

¾ pound kosher salt

Make sure the salt completely covers the fish. Set the casserole dish in the refrigerator for 5 days. Use the underside of a plate or a small cutting board to lightly press down on the fish daily, to compress it. Some of the salt will liquefy; this is fine — just drain it off after you press on the fish. If you need to add more salt to keep the fish completely covered, do so.

DAY 6

Take the dish from the refrigerator and remove the fish, brushing off as much salt as possible (the fish should feel quite firm). Wrap the fish loosely in a few layers of cheesecloth and then elevate it over a rimmed baking sheet (two sets of chopsticks work nicely for holding up the fish; you can also use a flat wire rack). Dry the fish in the refrigerator for 1 week. After a week, the fish should be dense, hard, and impervious to light pressure.

Salt cod keeps indefinitely; if you plan to eat it within 2 weeks, store it in the refrigerator in an airtight container. If you'd like to keep the fillet longer, as is done traditionally, hang it (see Note below) or put it on a rack in a cool, dry place (a cellar or a shed, for example), where it will continue to dry and harden, taking on a brackish, soft-wood aroma that many connoisseurs prize.

NOTE: Instead of drying the fish in cheesecloth in the refrigerator, you can dry it in a curing chamber. Set the chamber to 40°F with 70 percent humidity. If the skin is on, hang the cod from a hook; if it's skinless, tie a string around it and hang the fish from the string. In either case, let it hang for 3 weeks.

Go Fish

I like to play this parlor game: Ask your friends to name at least 10 fish they eat regularly. Most will have a hard time accomplishing this. Now ask those same folks to remember what they saw the last time they visited an aquarium. Do you get where I'm going with this?

As eaters, we should seek out and sample all the myriad options of fish out there. A great way to get lesser-known species into your market is to request them. Talk to the fishmongers at the local grocery stores and butcher shops and try to get them to bring in some new varieties. Some of my favorites are triggerfish, lionfish, tilefish, amberjack, wahoo, bonito, herring, fresh sardines, and any fish in the mackerel family.

If you're not sure which is the most sustainable fish to purchase, there are a number of guides to help you out. My favorite is from the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch. The people there print a great little pocket guide that I keep dog-eared in my wallet. (I hear there's an app for it, too, for you more modern folks.)

Guides are great, but remember that they often tell only half the story. Besides being aware of the type of fish you buy, it's important to determine from whom you're buying your fish (see page 34). The oceans have immense potential, and through good stewardship, fish can move from the "avoid" list to the "buy" list in a matter of decades, or maybe just years.

Take swordfish, for example. For the first eight years of my career I never cooked a piece of swordfish — it was culinary taboo. Now swordfish is a sound fish to buy. The fishermen who sacrificed for a decade to recover fisheries now deserve to be rewarded with a buying public happy to have responsibly fished swordfish on their table.

Look for the good fisherman and the good fish, and our oceans will remain alive and exciting.

SALT COD FRITTERS WITH SPICY RUM SAUCE

SERVES 10 TO 12 AS AN APPETIZER

Salt cod has culinary resonance along all the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean. In the Western repertoire, many people are familiar with the French *brandade* (a puree) and *bacalao* (the Spanish word for dried salt cod), but one of my favorite recipes comes from the Caribbean. For these salt cod fritters, a rum sauce is the natural accompaniment.

Soak

1 pound salt cod (see page 34)

in a large bowl of fresh water for 12 hours, changing the water every 4 hours (this eliminates a good amount of the salt and makes the flesh soft and pliable).

When the cod has about 1 hour remaining to soak, make the rum sauce. Into a medium saucepan put

1½ cups dark rum

1 cup packed light brown sugar

1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger

¼ habanero chile, minced

zest of 1 lime

2 sprigs of fresh mint

8 whole allspice berries

Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat, reduce the heat to low, and simmer until reduced by half, about 5 minutes.

To the reduced rum mixture, add

½ red bell pepper, finely chopped

½ celery stalk, finely chopped

1 scallion, finely chopped

juice of 1 lime

1 cup rice vinegar

2 tablespoons fish sauce (or Modern Garum, page 44)

Return to a simmer, then turn off the heat. Remove the mint sprigs and allspice berries, and refrigerate the sauce until chilled.

To make the fritters, cut the cod into 1-inch pieces, and transfer into the bowl of a food processor. Add

½ cup all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

1½ teaspoons ground allspice

2 eggs

Pulse to combine, but *not* until it's smooth; you want some larger flakes of cod in the mixture. With a rubber spatula, scrape the mixture into a large bowl and stir in

2 scallions, thinly sliced

¼ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro

½ jalapeño (remove the seeds for less heat), finely chopped

Heat

3 cups neutral-flavored oil (such as canola or vegetable oil)

in a medium saucepan over medium until it reaches 325°F on a digital thermometer. Drop the batter by the tablespoonful into the oil. Take care not to overcrowd the pan or the fritters will stick together and the temperature of the oil will drop. Cook, using a frying spider or a slotted spoon to turn the fritters, until they're browned on both sides, about 1 minute per side. Transfer to a paper towel–lined plate and repeat with the remaining batter.

Serve hot with the rum sauce.

Black Cod

BLACK COD, KNOWN AS SABLEFISH in the Jewish community, is traditionally cured with paprika and then smoked. This buttery and delicious fish commands an even higher price than does Nova lox. Russian Jews popularized sable and brought it to the rest of the hemisphere where it became a luxury for appetizing platters.

Black cod runs from the Bering Sea and Alaska to Baja, California, and can live for more than 90 years. Most black cod is exported to Japan, where it's highly prized (can you imagine the late 1990s without Nobu Matsuhisa's famous and often imitated miso-cured cod?).

Like other Northern Pacific fish, including sturgeon and Pacific salmon, black cod has rich intramuscular fat, which gives it an incredibly buttery texture (it's sometimes called butterfish for just that reason). By the way, black cod is actually not a cod at all. Whereas cod is well known for having very little fat and drying to hardtack, black cod is rich and flaky and won't dry out no matter how much it's abused and smoked. It's a fine sustainable choice in general, and a solid alternative to Chilean sea bass and salmon.

Smoked Black Cod

1 SMOKED SIDE

This smoked fish is meant to be flaked rather than sliced, to show off the contrast between the dark purple of the fish’s surface and its buttery white flesh inside. My favorite way to serve it is slightly warm with some steamed fingerling potatoes and a green salad. Make it into a light fish salad simply by snipping some chives over it and delicately dressing the fish with a good olive oil.

In a large, nonreactive pot, bring to a boil

- **1 (750 ml bottle) inexpensive red wine**
- **6 crushed garlic cloves**

1 cup packed light brown sugar

1 cup soy sauce

3 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves stripped and finely chopped

2 sprigs fresh rosemary, leaves stripped and finely chopped

¼ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1½ tablespoons dried lavender pistils (lightly crushed with a knife)

1½ tablespoons whole pink peppercorns

Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 5 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the marinade cool for 30 minutes, then transfer it to a bowl or container and refrigerate it to chill thoroughly, about 2 hours or overnight.

In a large roasting pan, place skin-side up

1 2½-pound side of black cod (or sturgeon)

Pour the chilled marinade over the fish, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 24 hours.

DAY 2

Set a wire rack over a rimmed baking sheet. Remove the roasting pan from the refrigerator and transfer the fish, flesh-side up, to the rack. Let the fish sit at room temperature for 1½ hours. Meanwhile, prepare a smoker to 155°F using fruitwood and a medium smudge (see page 23). Once the surface of the fish is thoroughly dried, set the rack in the smoker and smoke for about 1½ hours, making sure the smoker's temperature never rises above 165°F. If it gets too hot, open the chamber to lower the heat. You can also place a tray of ice between the smoke and the fish in the chamber to regulate the heat if your box tends to run hot.

Remove the fish from the smoker and either flake and serve immediately while warm or refrigerate until cold and flake as an accompaniment to salad or potato cakes. To store, drizzle with a little neutral oil and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for up to 10 days.

The Mother of All Sauces

FOR MILLENNIA, PEOPLE HAVE BEEN PUTTING all sorts of different products into barrels along with a handful of salt to act as a preservative. Among the sauces that have resulted are the modern-day Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, tamari, Thai fish sauce, and even ketchup (originally made with all sorts of foraged ingredients, such as mushrooms, elderberries, and wild herbs). For me, garum is the mother of all sauces. It's made by fermenting the guts and entrails of oily fish with just enough salt to control the fermentation process and keep unwanted bacteria at bay. After 3 months, what you have is a thick, dark, rich liquid condiment that, when sprinkled over rich meats and game, brightens and enriches their flavor and adds an umami-like depth to grains, pilafs, and roasted vegetables. Use as you would Worcestershire sauce.

I first spotted garum in *Apicius,* a book dating from first-century Rome that many consider to be the first cookbook. To understand an ancient recipe with any accuracy, you have to imagine the cultural landscape of the day and be able to re-create it in your mind. This enables you to get in tune with the socioeconomic structure of a people, a culture, a region. Re-creating historically significant foods is akin to traveling through time. Culinary magic!

Garum was called for in at least 80 percent of the recipes in *Apicius* (of some 470 recipes in all, almost half were for sauces), and for good reason. As a finished product, a few sprinkles of it transform a surly joint of roasted meat into a palate-pleaser. No wonder the ancient Romans used it to add flavor to (or perhaps even disguise the taste of) food.

Modern Garum

MAKES 1½ CUPS

This recipe expresses a beautiful frugality, a requirement of any significant recipe. Taking a part of the fish that was otherwise unused (its guts) and mixing it with salt was an excellent way to extract every last scrap of vital matter from the food. The first man or woman to discover this must have

been intrepid, for although the finished condiment is indeed mild, the curing and fermenting process involves the straight-up rotting of innards: a challenging process of strong odors, to say the least! In the end, thankfully, garum repaid its patient “inventor”: it imparts the faintest smell of the deep ocean and is packed with glutamines, the same amino acids that give MSG its characteristic flavor-enhancing properties.

In a large food-grade plastic container, place

- **1 pound fresh fish entrails, small bones, and heads (from oily fish such as anchovies, herring, mackerel, and sardines)**
- **⅓ pound kosher salt**
- **1½ cups pineapple juice**

Cover with a lid and shake vigorously to combine. Use a hot needle to prick the lid three times to enable fermentation gases to escape (without allowing too much of the “fragrance” to escape as well). Set the container in a 70°F to 85°F spot for 2 weeks to kick-start the fermentation process. After 2 weeks, move the container to a cooler spot, around 65°F, for 3 months. (Be patient: After 1 month, the aroma subsides considerably.) Don’t worry about the temperature too much; this is a natural process that will adjust itself over the course of fermentation, much as does lactic fermentation. Check the fish sauce every week. If you see any green mold on the surface, use a spoon to skim it off, then stir in another to inhibit more growth. If you see pink mold, throw away the whole batch and start again. (That said, I’ve never seen pink mold in my many batches of garum and have had green mold just once.)

- **¼ cup salt**

After 3 months, strain the garum through a fine-mesh sieve and into a nonreactive saucepan (discard the solids). Stir in

¼ cup honey

1 large sprig fresh oregano

and bring the liquid to a simmer over high heat. The natural albumin in the liquid will quickly clump; spoon that out and discard, and the remaining liquid will be clear. Strain again through cheesecloth or a coffee filter into a 12-ounce glass cruet. Cork the bottle and refrigerate for eternity.

Samphire

THE FOOD WITH PERHAPS THE STRONGEST CONNECTION to its landscape is samphire. I tried it when I worked my first culinary gig, at Larry Forgione's

American Place in New York City. Taking a bite was like sticking a straw in the ocean and sucking out its briny essence. Its flavor brings me back to a beach, perhaps a solitary morning walk along the rocks, or maybe a long-ago summer weekend at the shore. Its sea taste evokes the life that lies just beneath the ocean's glassine surface. That's samphire.

Also called sea beans, sea asparagus, sea pickles, *pous-pied* (sea feet), and my favorite, glasswort (which refers to its traditional use as a fining agent in the making of glass), this succulent plant grows along coastlines and in marshy areas. It looks like a cross between an asparagus stem and a finger of ginger. It's popular in England, where it's boiled or steamed and then served with butter.

When picking samphire, go after the younger, lighter-colored tendrils that grow at the ends of a plant. Once a plant matures, a woody stem begins to grow up the center of the vascular system and, although technically edible, when pickled it has the texture and appeal of a maraschino cherry stem.

That said, if you can only find older plants, with a little patience and care you can remove the tiny hard thread. After blanching the samphire, pinch the root end at the joint of each tendril and tug lightly to remove the woody part. If you've ever slipped the dew-laden stamen from a honeysuckle flower to drink the nectar, the light tugging, at least, is similar.

Instant Samphire Pickles

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

This is the simplest pickle you'll ever make. Because sea beans are naturally salty, you don't need additional salt. Instead, I add a small piece of Thai bird's-eye chile (for a spicy bite) and some citrusy coriander to complement the strong taste of briny ocean. Serve pickled samphire as a garnish for steamed or grilled fish, or add to a shaved vegetable and herb salad.

Sterilize four 8-ounce jars (see page 19). Divide evenly among them

- **2 pounds sea beans (samphire)**
- **4 dried bird's-eye chiles (lightly crushed so the chiles are partially open)**
- **4 teaspoons whole coriander seeds**
- **2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced**

In a large nonreactive pot, bring to a boil

- **4 cups vinegar**
- **2 cups water**

Pour the vinegar mixture into each of the packed jars, leaving about ½ inch of headspace in each. Follow instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 5 minutes in a boiling-water bath. Store in a cool, dark, and dry spot for up to 1 year. After opening, refrigerate for up to 6 months.

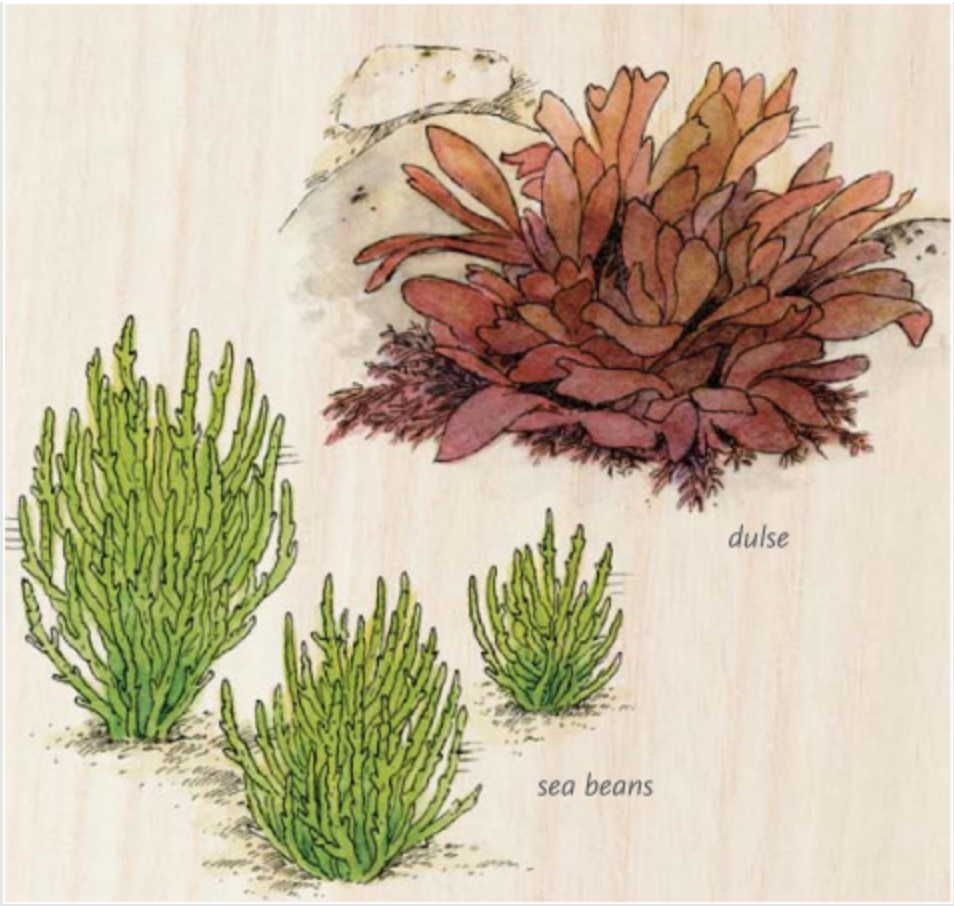
Sea Vegetables

Modern Western culture focuses on land vegetables, but sea vegetables have had a place in history for millennia, especially throughout Asia, northern Europe, and the British Isles. Seaweeds may not taste like your average supermarket vegetables, but they have one of the broadest spectrums of minerals of any food and are a great source of lignans, which are phytonutrients that help protect against certain cancers.

In Japan, people have consumed seaweeds such as wakame, nori, and kombu for thousands of years, in salads, as sushi wrappers, and as a natural source of umami (an almost indescribable taste sensation).

Kombu has an MSG-like effect when a small piece is boiled with beans or in stock. Seaweed cakes made from laver are a main component of a complete Welsh breakfast; they're formed by mixing the seaweed with oats, shaping the mixture into cakes, and then frying them in bacon fat. Irish moss is used in a traditional creamy Jamaican drink (see page 51) and was also a primary source of sustenance for the Irish themselves during the potato famine of the 1840s and 1850s.

Seaweed may not sound appetizing, but it's a wonderfully sustainable and healthful source of protein, minerals, vitamins, and amino acids. Generally, seaweeds need no aid in their preservation: gather some from the ocean and lay them on a rack to dry. When cured and cooked thoroughly, seaweed can feed populations through harsh winters and long seasons of poor harvest. Seaweed is one of the quieter solutions for a more sustainable future. It's readily available, grows in prolific quantities in healthy oceans, and is packed with vitamins and minerals.



Irish Moss

WHEN YOUR LANDSCAPE IS AN ISLAND, from a foraging perspective, the wilds of the deep blue are just as important as the interior. Irish moss grows along the coast of Ireland as well as in rocky outcropped sites along the North Atlantic coast of England, continental Europe, and Canada. The fronds are arranged in a beautiful antlered pattern and the fibers of the plant itself are packed through and through with gelatin. During their nineteenth-century famine, the Irish foraged for Irish moss, whose hefty amounts of calcium and potassium combined with a multitude of vitamins helped them survive.

You may know Irish moss by another name: carrageenan, a popular emulsifier and stabilizer for ice cream, condensed milk, and soy milk. It's also used to thicken shampoo and to clarify traditional cask-conditioned ales of cloudy yeast clusters and sediment. For the average preindustrial

home cook, the gelling properties of Irish moss were some of the easiest to obtain, as all that was required was a day by the seashore and a few good hours of boiling in a pot of water.

When used fresh, the moss maintains much of its deep-ocean flavor. If it's first dried in the sun, however, the flavor as well as its red color blanches away, leaving a flavorless substance that can be added to all sorts of puddings and sweets. It's this quality that makes it unique among its seaweed cousins and has earned it an important place in our modern cuisine.

For the Irish, the moss was a symbol of luck that they took on long journeys, which may explain how the moss arrived in Jamaica. (Though it wasn't such good luck that made them indentured servants and slaves to the crown in the first place.) In any case, Irish moss has become synonymous with the creamy, milkshake-like drink available bottled and canned in Jamaica, where it's regarded as a "health" cocktail: that is, it's thought by some to increase a man's libido and energy. As with countless other folk medicines throughout the world, hope springs eternal. . . .

Irish Moss Cocktail

SERVES 4

Not at all like the stereotype of the “easy-mon” Jamaican, my sous chef, Denton Omarley Whyte, who was born in Jamaica, constantly impresses me with his work ethic. He taught me this recipe, and now I think I know the secret of where he and his countrymen get their energy and focus.

Traditionally, the mixture is boiled and then “lightened” with condensed milk and sweet spices. (I add a little coconut to the mix, though Denton says that’s because I’m influenced by what he terms a “colada haze.”) The shake is thick, potent, and cooling on a hot summer day. The traditional recipe does not contain any alcohol, but I thought it a shame to call something a cocktail without doctoring it with a little spirit.

In a large pot, bring to a boil

4 cups water
4 ounces dried Irish moss (or 1 nice frond of fresh sea moss)
1 ounce (1 nice-sized pebble) gum arabic
1½ tablespoons flax seeds
1 pinch isinglass threads (see Note below)

Reduce the heat to a soft simmer and cook until the liquid is thick, opaque, and blue-gray, and the Irish moss is but a skeleton of what it was, about 45 minutes (if the water evaporates too quickly, add more). Cool completely, then refrigerate until thoroughly chilled. The jelly lasts for 1 month; you’ll have enough left over for two more batches of the cocktail.

Scoop out 1 cup of the jelly and put it in a blender. Add

2 jiggers white rum
1 cup coconut milk
1 (14-ounce) can condensed milk
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoon cinnamon
freshly grated nutmeg

1 cup ice

Blend until smooth, then serve.

NOTE: Isinglass looks like semitransparent rice stick noodles, but it comes from the bladders of sturgeon and other fish and is used as a clarifying agent (often in wine, beer, and even window panes). You'll find it in some specialty-food stores, or substitute seaweed-derived agar-agar (also known as Japanese isinglass or vegetable isinglass), as this similarly liquefies when blended. In this recipe, use 4 teaspoons of agar-agar in place of the isinglass.

Kelp

KELP FORESTS PLAY AN IMPORTANT PART in the ocean's ecology, acting as huge filters for cleaning the water's impurities as well as providing a safe haven for sea life. Giant kelp is one of the fastest-growing plant species in the world — it can grow up to 2 feet a day, making it incredibly sustainable to harvest.

In Japan it is called *kombu*, and it imparts an umami-salty flavor to *dashi* (a broth central to Japanese cooking) and is also a tenderizing agent for boiling dried beans. Glutamines, the amino acids within kelp, lend a natural flavor-enhancing saltiness to beans, broth, and whatever else you add them to.

Fish was traditionally kept fresh by being wrapped in kelp that had been lightly soaked in cold seawater. By the time Japan's fishmongers had made their night's journey and arrived in town to sell their wares, they realized that not only did the fish arrive cold and fresh, but the umami flavor of the kelp had perfumed the fish most pleasingly as well.

After making batches of dashi for the restaurant, I often have an excess of softened kelp in the kitchen. As I hate to let anything go to waste, I put the kombu to work by wrapping it around red snapper, a light and flaky fish that benefits in flavor and texture from the glutamines in the sea vegetable.

I blanch the kombu to make it pliable, then wrap it around the pieces of fresh fish to imbue it with a mild saltiness as well as to tighten the flesh. This helps the fish obtain that classic slick yet firm bite (untreated fish gets mushy and soft), so it is sliceable and pleasing to eat.

Kombu-Cured Red Snapper

MAKES 1½ POUNDS

This is a light way to preserve fish. The curing process imbues a wonderful aroma and draws out some of the moisture, making it easier to slice and

giving it a more appealing chew. Serve as is or alongside some crisp vegetables such as white turnips and radishes, perhaps with a mini herb salad.

Fill a medium bowl with cold water and add

6 ounces kombu (about 4 sheets)

Once the kombu is somewhat pliable, remove it from the water and set aside. Discard the water. Into the bowl, put

¼ cup yuzu juice (see Note, page 56)

1 tablespoon honey

1 tablespoon soy sauce

Put the kombu in the marinade and soak for a few minutes, until it is soft. Remove and set aside.

Lay a 16-inch-long piece of plastic wrap on your work surface. Set two pieces of marinated kombu on top, so the short ends face you. Set on top, flesh-side down, the first of

2 (12-ounce) red snapper fillets

Drizzle some marinade over the fish and then tightly enclose in the plastic wrap. Repeat with another piece of plastic, two more pieces of kombu, and the other snapper fillet. Refrigerate the fish for 24 hours; then it's ready to eat.

DAY 2

To serve, unwrap the fish and slice it crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices. Thinly slice the kombu and add to whatever vegetables or salad you're using as an accompaniment.

NOTE: If you can't find yuzu juice, substitute equal parts lemon and lime juice with the zest of half of a lemon.

Dulse and Nori

PROBABLY MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE FOOD is plain sticky white rice sprinkled with any type of *furikake,* a natural seasoning made from dulse and nori seaweed, sesame seeds, a touch of sugar, salt, and a variety of other ingredients such as dried fish flakes, shrimp flakes, egg yolks, radish tops, smoked meat, chiles, and even tea leaves.

Dulse grows readily in the North Atlantic Ocean and has been used for centuries by seafarers as a restorative addition to chowders and cakes. It grows in the intertidal regions and is usually harvested in knee-deep water when the tide is out. Dulse can grow up to 3 feet long, but I often find them in much smaller clusters of about a foot. Dulse clings to rocky shoals by a steadfast, a type of marine root cluster that lives up to its name. To harvest, cut them off by the root, rather than try to tug them away from the rocks.

Dulse is rich in B vitamins, iron, and potassium, and though it has a great sea flavor, it's quite low in naturally occurring sodium. Fresh dulse should be thoroughly washed before you lay it out to dry in the sun (or another hot place). After it has lost most of its moisture, it will be dry and brittle and ready for storage. You can also dry it in the microwave to achieve a degree of brittleness. Set it to low power and dry it for about 30 seconds. I'm hopelessly ignorant about this form of cookery (my only success has been with popcorn, and that's because there's a popcorn button), but you're welcome to take this shortcut.

If you are not near an ocean, dulse is available in health food stores as either a dry flake or a leaf. The whole leaf form is soft and chewy, and I often enjoy it as a snack, tucking it between my cheek and gum and sucking out all the good flavor before slowly chewing and then swallowing the gelatinous fiber.

The other wild harvested seaweed I use in furikake is nori. Nori is made from various lavers, which are the slimiest of all the seaweeds (isn't that odd, as nori is probably the most popular of all the edible seaweeds). Laver has been wildcrafted by people all over the North Sea for centuries. In Ireland and Wales, for example, laver cakes were an important food under

famine conditions (see page 49), and many traditional wildcrafted stews of those countries depended on the nutrients and minerals found in laver.

It is the ancient Japanese, though, who perfected the art of harvesting and cooking with laver: they devised an elegant way of creating paper-thin sheets out of this slimy mess, and I can't think of traditional Japanese cuisine without thinking of nori. Nori is produced commercially through a complicated process of boiling, grinding, and drying the resulting pulp on racks.

Furikake Seaweed Salt

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

Furikake gives a blast of umami to the most ordinary of meals. Sprinkle it on plain sticky rice and any type of noodle, simply prepared steamed vegetables, and lightly grilled meats and fish. The sesame seeds reduce the amount of salt in the seasoning and the mineral-rich seaweeds ensure that your body gets what it's craving when you hanker for a salty snack.

In a small bowl, stir until dissolved

2 tablespoons fine sea salt

1 tablespoon sugar

¼ cup warm water

and set aside. Heat a medium skillet over medium-low and pour in

1 cup sesame seeds

Toast the sesame seeds, stirring often, until they're golden, 5 to 7 minutes. Pour the salt-sugar water over the sesame seeds. The liquid will bubble violently; once it calms down, stir the sesame seeds so they don't clump. Reduce the heat to low and continue to toast the sesame seeds for 30 seconds. The pan will be almost dry at this point. Watch the seeds, as you don't want the sugar to burn. Remove the pan from the heat and crumble in

2 sheets nori

1 (6-inch) sheet dulse (or cup dry dulse flakes)

Set the pan back over low heat and stir the dulse and seeds. The seaweed will soften up a bit, and then become fragrant and dry. Once the seaweed is crisp again and dry to the touch, after about 30 seconds, remove the pan from the burner and turn out the seasoning onto a large platter to cool. Put the furikake into a glass jar or shaker. This will keep forever, but I use mine up quickly.

Anchovies

When I was nine years old, my family traveled to the Greek islands. We stayed in a little villa abutting a concrete wall onto which a rickety ladder was strapped. The ladder led straight to the ocean: reach the bottom, let go, and there you were, surrounded by sapphire waters. On one occasion I jumped into a school of small fish zipping around, swirling in a vague circle, as in a piscine dance. It was unbelievably beautiful, especially when the sun hit their silvery bodies just right, and they'd look like streaks of silver, darting and shimmering beneath my floating body. That's when I realized what a school of fish was: not a few fish, but rather thousands!

Since ancient times, anchovies have been an important component of diets around the world. Small in size, they swim in schools like the one I experienced in Greece, in warm waters from South Africa to Spain, from Peru to China. The early Greeks and Romans fermented anchovies with salt to make garum (see page 44), a fish sauce that gave a bold, rich, salty taste to meat dishes and cooked vegetables, and anchovies were so important in Turkey that poems and songs are dedicated to the *hamsi*. The proliferation of anchovy canneries in northern Spain (the Costa Brava) gave rise to the region's nickname the Costa de l'Anxova, the Anchovy Coast, where there's even an annual anchovy festival. Southern France is also noted for anchovies.

The large white anchovies, especially from L'Escala in Spain and Collioure in France, are prized above all others. They're harvested May through October, at their savory peak, and either salt-cured or cured with vinegar

and oil and called *boquerónes*. For the salt-cured variety, I dare not write a recipe, as all it takes is equal amounts of cleaned anchovies and fine sea salt, as well as maybe a bay leaf or a sprig of thyme. This method takes 2 to 4 weeks, but once the tiny fish are cured, they'll last the rest of the year. *Boqueróne*-style anchovies are a lot less salty, and their method of preparation employs three techniques to achieve the tastiest results. First the anchovies are lightly salted to begin drying and preserving the flesh. Second, they're dunked in a quick pickle of apple cider vinegar to lightly "cook" the flesh. Third, they're buried under a layer of oil, citrus, and bay laurel to remoisten the flesh, at the same time protecting them from bacterial growth.

Garlic and Oil–Cured Anchovies

MAKES TWO 4-OUNCE JARS

It's simple to butterfly anchovies, but if you don't have the time or the inclination, your fishmonger can remove the backbones and heads. Remember to ask for the bones and innards if you plan on making garum (see page 44). I like a lightly cured anchovy. If you prefer *boquerónes* with a more pickled taste, allow them to cure in the refrigerator for up to 2 days before adding the oil. I love these with hard cheese and crusty bread.

Fill a large bowl with ice water. One by one, quickly dip and swish

- **1 pound fresh anchovies**

Place each anchovy on a clean, paper towel–covered plate. Pick up a fish and hold it upside down, so the belly faces you. Locate the gills, which are directly below the jaw, place your thumb inside the gill area, and gently press down to the belly cavity. The flesh is very soft and this should be easy. Scrape halfway down the body until you come to the ribs; remove the guts and discard (or save for making garum). Repeat with the remaining anchovies.

Empty the bowl and refill it with fresh, cold water. Rinse and swish the anchovies again. Place on a fresh paper towel and use another paper towel

to blot dry. Hold an anchovy, right-side up, in one hand. Place your thumb on one side of the backbone and drag it down toward the tail. (It's like unzipping a dress.) The backbone will pop out. Repeat on the other side and carefully break off the backbone from the tail. Pull out the whole backbone; this will simultaneously remove the head, as it's attached to the backbone. Repeat with the remaining anchovies.

In a small bowl, mix together

½ cup fine sea salt

4 thinly sliced garlic cloves

Place a quarter of the salt mixture in the bottom of a 9- by 13-inch baking dish. Lay about a third of the fish, on their sides, atop the salt. Cover with a third of the remaining salt mixture and half the remaining anchovies. Repeat with half the remaining salt and the rest of the anchovies. Sprinkle the last of the salt mixture on top. Set aside for 20 minutes to sweat, and then drizzle with

2 cups apple cider vinegar

Wrap the baking dish with plastic and refrigerate for 8 hours (or longer; see above). The flesh of the anchovies will be opaque white.

Wearing gloves, drain the vinegar from the anchovies. Pack two sterilized (see page 19) widemouthed half-pint jars half full of anchovies. If you'd like, include some of the sliced garlic. Cover with

extra-virgin olive oil (about 2 cups when all's done)

Add to each jar

1 bay leaf (2 leaves total)

a few strips lemon zest (from half a lemon)

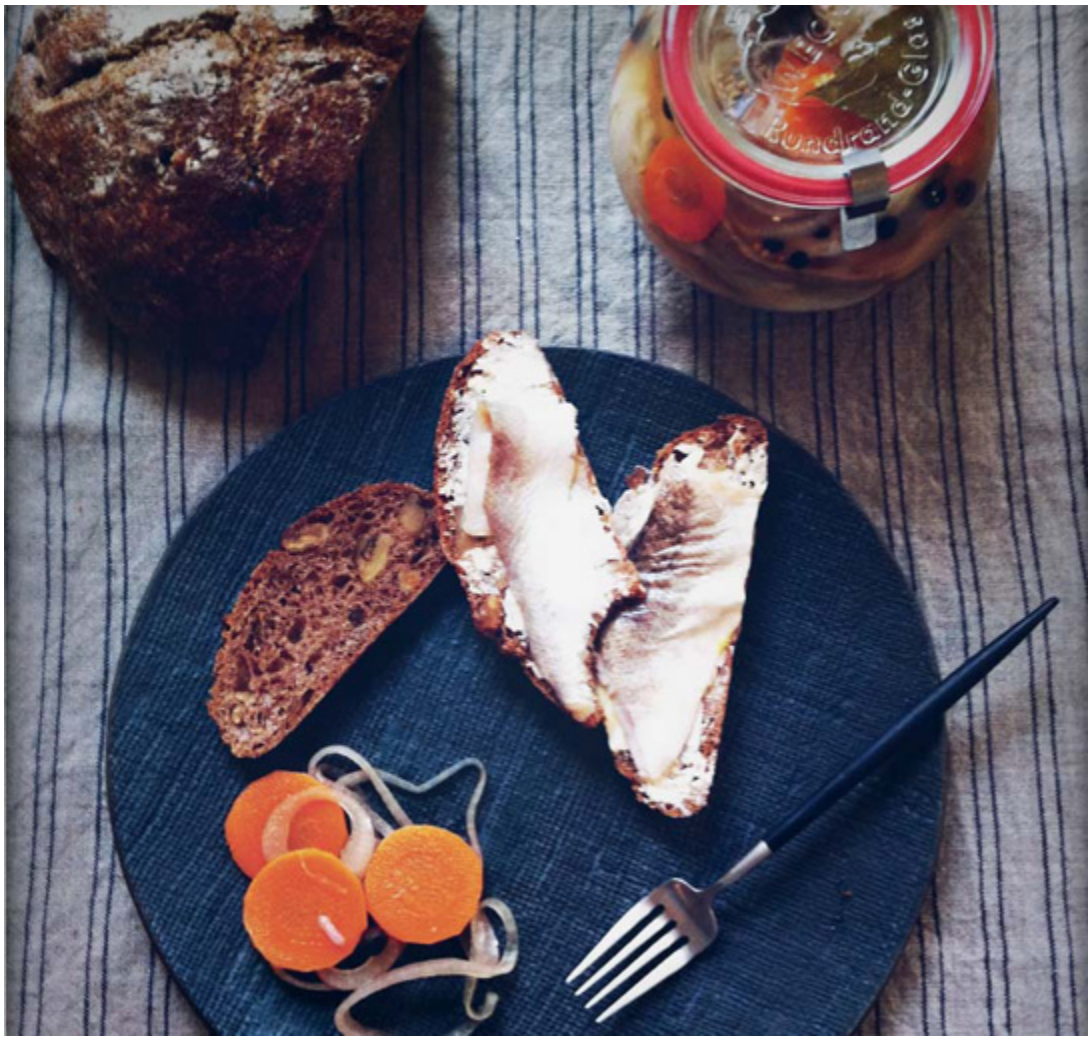
Add another layer of anchovies and cover with enough oil to submerge them all. Cover with a lid and refrigerate until well chilled, at which time you may serve them.

These anchovies will last about 2 months in the refrigerator. Always use scrupulously clean chopsticks or a small fork to remove anchovies from the jar to prevent bacterial contamination from fingers or a dirty utensil.

Herring

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO PREPARE herring, from frying them whole and fresh (whitebait), to smoking them (kippers), to pickling or otherwise preserving them (Majtes herring, vinegary rollmops, creamed herring with sour cream and onions, buttery schmaltz herring, and pickled Japanese herring). Whereas cured anchovies are salty strips that are more chewy than soft, herring are more similar to sardines (and they belong to the same family) but fleshier, richer, and with a fatty bite.

One of my favorite ways to prepare this fish is in the sweet style of Bismarck herring, which includes carrots, onions, and a pickly brine. This was favored by the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck in the late 1800s; a crafty fish vendor named it for him. The carrot and onion add sweetness to the fish’s strong flavor and make this a complete dish, especially with some good black bread on the side.



Bismarck Herring with Young Carrots and Onions

MAKES FOUR 4-OUNCE JARS

As I’ve mentioned, I have a sweet tooth, so for me, adding a pinch or two of sugar can be welcome in a savory dish. It wakes up and balances flavors — kind of like salt on watermelon. Here, the sweet brine curbs the rich, oily nature of the fish. Have your fishmonger clean the herring for you. Six fish will yield the 2 pounds of fillets called for.

In a medium nonreactive saucepan, bring to a boil

2 cups white wine vinegar

¾ cup water

¼ cup sugar

2 carrots, peeled and sliced into ⅛-inch-thick rounds

1 red onion, thinly sliced

1 tablespoon black peppercorns

1 tablespoon yellow mustard seeds

2 teaspoons kosher salt

16 whole allspice berries

4 whole cloves

2 fresh bay leaves

Turn off the heat. Pour the brine into a medium bowl and set it in an ice-water bath. Once the brine is cool, remove the bowl from the ice water, cover with plastic, and refrigerate. To make the second brine, clean out the saucepan and put in

4 cups water

2 celery stalks, coarsely chopped

½ sweet onion (such as a Maui or a Vidalia), coarsely chopped

¼ cup kosher salt

2 tablespoons sugar

zest of 1 lemon

Boil the mixture for 10 minutes, then pour into a medium bowl. To cool the brine, set the bowl in an ice-water bath. Cover it with plastic wrap and refrigerate. Once the brine is very cold, add

2 pounds fresh herring fillets

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate (along with the first brine) overnight.

NEXT DAY

Remove the bowl with the herring from the refrigerator. Transfer the herring to a paper towel–lined plate, pat dry, and set aside. Discard this brine.

Set four 4-ounce sterilized glass jars (see page 19) on the counter. Carefully divide the herring among the jars so that there's one layer in each. Strain the first brine (reserving the carrots, onions, and spices) into another bowl and then pour a little of this clear brine into each jar. With tongs, add some of the carrots and onions. Repeat layering the herring, brine, and vegetables until they are all used. Add a

bay leaf

to the top of each jar and then divide the spices that remain equally among the jars (the fish should be submerged at this point). Screw on the lids and refrigerate for at least 24 hours before serving. After 2 days, the herring will be completely pickled. Unopened, the herring keeps for up to 1 month; after opening, use the herring within about 5 days.

Sardines

IN THE WORLD OF FISH NOMENCLATURE, humans are lazy. Rather than pay respect to each type of tiny silver fish in the ocean, we have lumped these fast swimmers into an amorphous category called "the sardine." Basically, when we say "sardine," we mean a small fish, usually of the herring family, that is tasty but oily. There are 20 types of small fish that can be classified as a "sardine."

It seems the more common the fish on our table, the lazier we are. When we say "bass," we're usually referring to anything of medium size with grayish or black coloring; "snapper" is any finned fish with red coloring; "salmon" is a fish with pink flesh; "sole" is any mild, flaky flatfish; "trout" is something you catch in a river and looks, well, troutlike. Often these names are chosen by marketers looking for a familiar word to use to sell their catch. Whereas the Inuit famously have more than 50 words for snow, we have pitifully few words for the fish that grace our tables, reflecting and reinforcing our detachment from the natural world.

Salted Sardines, Coriander, and Thyme

MAKES 1 POUND

This recipe is simple and you're rewarded for your efforts much more quickly than you are for preparing, say, Bismarck Herring (see page 63). In addition, the fish retains the taste and the texture close to those of the fish in its freshest form. A copious amount of salt is called for; don't be scared away, though, as it's applied for only a short time before you wash it off. The quick salting tightens the flesh as it extracts a little bit of the moisture to extend its shelf life. These citrusy sardines are an excellent addition to a bitter-green salad.

In a medium bowl, combine

1½ cups kosher salt

½ cup sugar

Sprinkle a third of the salt-sugar mixture into the bottom of a 9- by 13-inch baking dish. Carefully add, flesh-side down,

1 pound (about 6) 6- to 8-inch cleaned and filleted fresh sardines (see page 69)

Cover the sardines with the remaining salt-sugar mixture, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Meanwhile, prepare the citrus marinade. In a small skillet set over medium heat, toast

2 tablespoons coriander seeds

Shake the pan occasionally until the seeds are fragrant and golden, about 1 minute, then transfer them to a plate to cool. When they've cooled, crush with a mortar and pestle, or put them in a resealable, quart-size plastic bag and crush with the bottom of a heavy pot or skillet (one thwack should be sufficient). Empty the crushed seeds into a medium bowl.

Peel the rind from

3 lemons

1 orange

Scrape off any pith (the white part) from the underside of the rind and then slice the rind into long, thin strips. Squeeze the juice from the fruits into the bowl with the coriander and add the strips. Stir in

1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

Remove the sardines from the refrigerator. Transfer the sardines to a fresh plate and brush the salt off both sides. The skin should be slightly wrinkled,

with beads of moisture on the surface, and the flesh should have a rosy hue. Discard the salt mixture still in the pan and put in half of

10 sprigs fresh thyme

Dip the sardines, one by one, in the citrus marinade and then lay them, skin-side up, on top of the thyme. Cover with the remaining 5 sprigs of thyme.

Pour the remaining marinade, along with the lemon and orange rinds, over the fish. Cover the pan with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 16 to 24 hours.

Into a 6-inch-long plastic container or mini glass loaf pan, pour ¼ cup of

extra-virgin olive oil

Remove a few sprigs of thyme from the baking dish and lay them on top of the oil, then add a few sardines. Repeat two or three times, pouring ¼ cup of the olive oil after each layer of sardines. Once all of the sardines are in the loaf pan, pour in enough olive oil to cover the last layer. Tightly cover the loaf pan and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, but preferably overnight.

The sardines will keep for 10 days to 2 weeks, depending on how fresh the fish was to begin with.

Cleaning and Filleting Sardines

If you’re fortunate enough to be able to fish for the sardines, you’ll have to clean and fillet them, too.

To clean: Rinse each fish under cool running water while gently rubbing its skin with your thumb, from tail to fin, to flake off the scales. Slice off the head and make a lengthwise incision in the belly from tip to tail and remove the insides. Rinse the fish again to wash away any remaining blood and dark matter (improper cleaning is one of the things that cause that “fishy” taste).

To fillet: Turn a sardine on its side and put the tip of a sharp knife inside the cavity where the head was. Run the knife along the skeleton (you'll feel it click against the bones as if you were playing a tiny xylophone), pressing gently, until you get to the tail. Remove the fillet and turn the fish so that the tail points toward the left. Insert the point of the knife beneath the tip of the spine and gently run it toward the tail, pulling up on the spine with your other hand. The skeleton should slip away.

Vintage Sardines

Would you consider eating sardines that were tinned 40 years ago? Lots of people clamor after "vintage" sardines, which means the sardines were canned anytime from a few years to decades ago. These sardines boast a nutty, nuanced flavor and less "fishy-ness," and collectors value the arty tins as much as they do the contents within. They even turn the cans monthly to ensure that the sardines don't dry out. (Over 40 years, that's a

lot of turns!) There's even a shop devoted to artisanal sardines *millésimées*: La Petit Chaloupe, in Paris's 13th arrondissement.

Mussels

THE SMOKED MUSSELS I CRAVE are fat and plump, the kind packed into sardine-type tins found in the canned-fish section of a market (often next to the tins of herring preserved in tomato sauce). Chinese smoked mussels are hard and somewhat tough, the result of curing and drying until they resemble wood chips. Although many people enjoy their more intense smoke and chew, I'm all about juicy smoked mussels that still hint of the sea.

I prepare smoked mussels in three stages. First, I steam them with a splash of white wine, some herbs, brown sugar, and chopped shallot. The key to keeping them plump is not to overcook them at this stage. Second, I "pickle" the mussels in a reduced version of the steaming liquid. Third, they go into the smoker at low heat to preserve their tenderness, but with an intense smudge (see page 23) to ensure that in the short time they smoke, they take on the flavor of the fruitwood and hardwood I use.

Before you're tempted to make smoked mussels, be sure your mussels are healthy. This means they're fresh, with closed shells. Discard any that have broken shells or have opened and don't close when tapped. The raw mussels should smell fresh — you'll know if there's a bad one. Find it and discard it; in the case of mussels, the mantra "When in doubt, throw it out" is best followed.

Smoked Mussels

MAKES TWO 8-OUNCE JARS

This recipe is designed for its immediate deliciousness rather than for long-term storage. The mussels stay plump and fresh for up to a week in the refrigerator.

In the sink, put

2 pounds fresh mussels

Using a scrub brush or rough scrub-type sponge, wash the mussels under cold running water to dislodge any sand and grit. If there is a scruffy beard attached to a mussel (this is where it was attached to the seaweed, rope, or rock that it clung to while it matured), remove it by gently pulling downward toward the hinge and away from the mussel. Discard any mussels that have cracked shells or smell off. If you want to save the shells for serving, unhinge them, save the best halves, scrub them well, and soak in a tub of water with 1 tablespoon of bleach for 5 minutes to kill bacteria or off odors. Drain the shells and set aside on a tray.

In a large pot set over medium-high heat, put

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

To the sizzling oil, add

3 shallots, finely chopped
3 sprigs fresh thyme
2 sprigs fresh marjoram (or 1 teaspoon dried)
2 teaspoons red pepper flakes

Cook, stirring often, until the onion begins to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in

¼ cup dark brown sugar
1 cup dry white wine

Once the sugar is dissolved, add the mussels, 1 cup at a time. Once all of the mussels are in the pan, vigorously shake it once, then cover. Increase the heat to high and let the mussels steam until they open up, about 5 minutes. Remove the lid and drain the mussels through a fine-mesh sieve set over a large bowl to catch the juices. Set aside the mussels and again strain the juices through a chinois or a cheesecloth-lined sieve to remove bits of debris. Pour the twice-strained broth into a medium saucepan and cook over medium heat, to concentrate the juices to about 2 cups.

While the broth reduces, remove the mussels from the shells (save the shells for serving) and reserve them in a large bowl. Pour the reduced broth over the mussels and set aside for 30 minutes while you prepare the smoker.

Prepare a smoke box to smoke at a medium smudge (medium so the mussels don’t shrivel too much). Remove the mussels from the brine and put them in a bowl with

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Transfer the mussels to a rimmed, aluminum foil–lined baking sheet and put the sheet in the smoke box. Smoke the mussels until they’re a rich mahogany, 30 to 45 minutes, turning them once midway through the process. Remove from the smoker and put in a clean bowl. Toss with

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Pack the mussels into two 8-ounce jars or airtight containers. Pour additional olive oil over the mussels, enough to cover.

Store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Serve on the reserved shells or freeze small portions in olive oil in resealable quart-size freezer bags for up to 3 months.

2 PASTURES & HEDGEROWS: GRAZING LANDS AND NATURAL BORDERS

OF ALL THE LANDSCAPES, PASTURES AND HEDGEROWS are perhaps the most accessible to the amateur forager. Pasturelands offer a hide-and-appear moment of wonder when you round a bend and spot an emerald bowl of grass. From afar, the field is a blank canvas stretching to the horizon, but come closer and you'll find a series of hillocks dotted with lone trees. The

gift is the myriad flourishing wild edibles — stinging nettles and dandelions, for example — as well as the delicious meat of ruminants that graze on them.

Often purposefully planted by farmers or landowners but left or abandoned to grow wild, hedgerows are what make a meadow into a checkerboard. I spent part of my childhood in England, and I fondly recall the pastureland surrounding our home, bounded by hedgerows of unruly blackberry brambles. Many an afternoon I crawled through the hedgerows to meet up with my neighbor and schoolmate to practice our swordplay. We'd have to pull up our gray-striped school socks as high as they'd go to protect our shins from the vines that protected the field almost as well as barbed fencing. Come midsummer, our swashbuckling adventures were forgotten and supplanted with greedy blackberry bliss. We'd stuff ourselves with the sweet-tart and slightly fuzzy berries, a treat that more than made up for the scrapes and scratches we endured the rest of the year.

Now that I'm all grown up, because these pastures and hedgerows were purposefully planted and now teem with semiwild fruits such as sloes (currant-type berries) and rose hips, as well as blackberries and raspberries, I sometimes question my actions: Am I foraging these planted-but-forgotten fruits or am I actually stealing them? I rationalize that if they're there and abundant, no one will miss a few bags full. Don't forage a cow, though — if you do, your fate is at the mercy of the farmer!

Rose Hips

IMAGINE OUR WESTERN BREAKFAST without a glass of vitamin C called orange juice. Tough, right? But in northern climates, this is a luxury of only the last fifty or so years. Before that, and in many other parts of the world today, rose hips are one of the easiest sources of vitamin C in teas, jams, syrups, and liqueurs.

The medicinal qualities of wild rose bushes were well known to the indigenous people of the Americas, a fact I'm reminded of when I stroll through the historic gardens and parks of Old Quebec and Montreal. It was there, while vacationing, that I stumbled across one of the biggest and prettiest groves of dog roses, the bushes sporting rose hips the size of small plums. The cultivation of ornamentals makes rose hips some of the easiest forageables to find in modern society: even in an urban environment, you're never far from a rosebush.

To collect rose hips, make sure the plants from which you want to harvest have not been treated with pesticides (you're safe collecting from the wild or a friend's garden). The hip — the fruit of the rose — first shows itself after a healthy blossom and then begins to swell. It reaches maturity in late

summer and early fall, but as with many wild-foraged plants, the nutrients and taste of rose hips are at their peak after the first frost. This is one of the techniques nature uses to ensure that her winter creatures great (deer) and small (birds) have access to the stored vitamins of the summer sun.

Old-World Rose-Hip Jam

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

Because rose hips aren't privy to the esters that give roses their justly famous scent, I add a splash of rose water to this genteel jam. Lightly crushed black cardamom pods provide a rich, smoky backbone — if you can't find them (try an Indian market) do *not* substitute green cardamom, which has more of a bright citrus taste. Instead, use a few whole cloves. It's fine to use dried hips as opposed to fresh. (For 1 pound of fresh rose hips, rehydrate ½ pound of the dried in a large bowl of boiling water until they're soft and sticky; they'll soak up all the liquid.) This is divine served in December with a Stilton cheese.

Put a small ceramic plate in the freezer. In a large stainless-steel pot, put

1¼ pounds rose hips (stem ends removed), halved

Cover the hips with water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until the hips break down and are soft and sticky, about 30 minutes.

Pour into a coarse-mesh strainer set over a large bowl. Using a rubber spatula, press the mixture through the strainer. Discard any large pieces that are still in the strainer. Transfer the pulp to a medium heavy-bottomed pot and add

3 black cardamom pods, split open

1 pound sugar (about 2 cups)

¼ cup grenadine

Slowly bring to a simmer over medium-low heat, stirring often to ensure that the sugar melts evenly until it's a medium-bodied syrup. Once all of the sugar is dissolved, increase the heat to medium and cook gently, stirring occasionally, until slow-rising gelling bubbles pop at the surface, 20 to 30 minutes.

Remove the plate from the freezer and drop a tablespoon of the hot mixture onto it. Tilt the plate. The mixture should hold the drop without running. If it doesn't, cook the mixture for a few more minutes. When it's the correct consistency, turn off the heat and stir in

¼ cup rose water

Set out four sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19). Keep the lids and bands in a saucepan of barely simmering water, while dividing the compote among the still-warm jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Following the instructions for canning on page 21, process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Stinging Nettles

STINGING NETTLES ARE PERHAPS THE EASIEST wild edibles to find. If you find yourself near a large field in the summertime, hike up your pant legs, roll down your socks, and go for a walk in the underbrush along the perimeter of the field. As you walk, your bare calves do the stalking — when you feel a prickly sensation on your legs, you can be pretty sure you've found a nice patch of wild nettles.

As a child, I loathed these invasive weeds for the misery they inflicted on my freckled legs. Now, as a chef, I treasure them for their deep, mineral flavor and nutritional benefits. They're loaded with vitamins and even proteins. Microscopic hypodermic needles that line the stalks and the underside of the leaves are the culprits that give these weeds their sting. What you're "injected" with is actually a histamine that many say offers relief from both arthritis and hay fever.

My friend Lubor, who is from Eastern Europe, where stinging nettles are widely used in cooking and home remedies, swears by the nettle's ability to,

as he puts it, “awaken” his spirit. In late spring, Lubor hikes into the woods to collect the weeds. He gathers them into a sort of broom, ties up the bunch, and then proceeds to strip down and flagel-late himself with it! One spring I had the opportunity to experience the “awakening” sensation with Lubor, and let me say, my body woke up right quick! Although many cultures throughout Eastern Europe and Russia swear by this ritual, I prefer to awaken my inner spirit with a crisp and delicious stinging nettle cordial.

Stinging Nettle Cordial

MAKES 3 QUARTS (TWO 750 ML WINE BOTTLES)

Some say you should use only the top leaves of a nettle (the bottom leaves and stems are too bitter). I find that an infusion made from the whole plant works just fine. This doesn’t affect the softly sweet and slight mineral flavor of the cordial and it doubles the yield, a nice way to repay the discomfort and the occasional rash that come from collecting the weeds. This bracing drink is lovely sipped over ice in the afternoon or turned into a nettle shandy by pouring ¼ cup of the cordial into a pint of English ale.

In a large bowl (and wearing gloves), put

- **1 bouquet stinging nettles**

Run cold water over the nettles and agitate them slightly to remove any dirt, bugs, and debris. Gather the nettles and remove them from the bowl, shaking off excess water. Put the nettles in a large pot with

3 quarts (12 cups) water

2 cups wildflower honey

1 (¼-inch) piece fresh ginger

Bring to a boil, then add

½ lemon, sliced into ¼-inch-thick rounds

Remove the pot from the heat and cover. Let the cordial infuse for 24 hours.

DAY 2

Strain the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a large pitcher. Divide the cordial between two sterilized 750 ml bottles (see page 19). Save immediately or store in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. Or use sterilized bottles and bottle capper (see Resources, page 247), or self-sealing bottles (recycled Grolsch beer bottles are perfect) and store at room temperature in a cool, dark place. To serve, pour ¼ cup of the cordial over ice and serve straight, or top off with a splash of still or sparkling water.

Edible Weeds: The First Signs of Spring

The mind is an odd coordinator of concepts, and that’s certainly true when the first days of warm spring weather bring hope to the air and hunger to the belly. All it takes is some chirping birds and a few rays of sunshine to have everyone salivating for asparagus, peas, and strawberries. In New York City, winter-starved locavores troll farmers’ markets in search of new spring edibles only to be disappointed by yet more winter squash and cellared apples.

It’s the catch-22 of early spring. Farmers know they have a hungry market to feed, but although the air has defrosted, their tilled plots have barely cracked their winter veneer. This is when the industrious head to

the “back forty,” the wild land adjacent to the cultivated fields, to see what crops up naturally.

By nature, weeds are survivors, strong enough to withstand freak late-season freezes and other hiccups in the early growing season. Stinging nettles, lamb’s-quarters, Good King Henry, cattail shoots, wild-garlic scapes, and lemon clover — weeds all — and fiddlehead ferns (harvested in wetlands rather than pastures) come early to market to satiate those cravings for fresh green food.

Eating weeds is nothing new, and not long ago, we knew how to collect from nature all kinds of shoots and greenery with which to make soups, sauces, and braised side dishes to accompany a hunk of roasted meat. Sadly, the world of edible plant matter has been compressed into a small group of vegetables that can withstand shipping and lengthy internments on grocery shelves. As depressing as this is, it also makes the resurgence of spring-foraged greens more deliciously awesome. Whether you do your hunting under the sun or via the glow of a computer screen or on a restaurant menu, spring’s first bounty is plentiful for those willing to look for it.

lemon clover

Dandelion

SOMETIMES FORAGING IS NOT SO MUCH AN ACT of finding something hidden as it is of seeing, in a new light, something right in front of you. No wild edible exemplifies this more than the dandelion. Probably the most readily identified flower in the botanical kingdom (ask any kid what flowers he or she can name), this springtime early-bloomer was used for centuries as a tonic to celebrate the end of winter by cleaning the liver and kidneys after all the heavy, rich, and fatty foods that sustained our ancestors through the cold.

Although dandelion greens have of late become de rigueur in salads, the most interesting parts of the plant, the sunshine yellow flowers, are largely overlooked. This is a shame, for when they're turned into a soft, quivering, straw-gold preserve (with more the feel of an aspic than of a jelly), they take on the flavor of a slightly musky floral honey, with a texture so delicate that it melts on the tongue. (The petals are strained out and discarded, leaving just their essence.)

Collecting the flowers is often great fun for children — give them each a small pail and send them on their way. When they return with their buckets full of blossoms, have them gently pull out the petals, making sure not to get any bits of the calyx (the green cup at the bottom of a blossom that holds the petals to the stem — its milk is 20 times more bitter than the leaves), and put them in a huge bowl.

Dandelion Jelly

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

The faint straw scent of the dandelions gets a subtly sweet boost from grated Golden Delicious apples, which in addition to their sweetness contribute natural pectin. I add some extra powdered pectin to ensure that the jelly sets to a soft jiggle. It's nice paired with a soft bloomy-rind cheese or as a parfait with buttery sponge cake and ripe berries.

In a large pot, bring to a boil

- **5 cups water**
- **2 Golden Delicious apples, shredded (with skin) on the fine-hole side of a box grater**
- **2 cups dandelion petals**

Turn off the heat and set aside the mixture to cool, about 2 hours.

Once the mixture is cool, strain it through a fine-mesh sieve over a medium bowl. With a rubber spatula, press on the mash to extract as much liquid as possible. Measure the liquid; you should have about 3 cups. If you fall

short, add enough cold tap water to make up the difference, then pour the liquid into a medium pot. (If you have too much, pour the excess over ice, add a drop of honey, and enjoy as a cold tisane.) Add

2¼ cups sugar

Over medium-low heat, bring the mixture to a boil. As it's heating, in a small bowl, whisk together

2¼ cups sugar

2 tablespoons powdered pectin

A Few Words about Pectin

Pectin is a natural gelling agent found in the skin, core, and hull of fruits such as apples (in fact, most powdered pectin is made from apples). Depending on what I want for the consistency of my jams and jellies, I occasionally add a little powdered pectin to make sure they have a good set. As in the Dandelion Jelly above, you must cut granulated pectin with sugar or it will clump. That said, in addition to the powdered pectin, I'll use fresh apples to provide the natural pectin necessary for gelling to occur. Generally speaking, I believe the whole is better than fractured parts and that the natural is superior to the manipulated. An apple is a perfect food — the skin, the core, the hull. Why not use the parts you might have otherwise discarded? Every element of every food has a place and purpose.

Add the pectin-sugar mixture to the boiling liquid, along with

¼ cup lemon juice (from 1 lemon)

Increase the heat to high and bring the mixture to a rapid boil. Skim off any foam that rises to the top, then continue cooking for 1 minute. Turn off the heat and divide the jelly among four sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19). Refrigerate for up to 3 weeks, or follow the instructions for canning on page 21, and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Sloes

THE SLOE PLUM, KNOWN AS *TRNKY* BY MY WIFE KATKA, isn't a plum but rather the dark grape-blue berry of the blackthorn tree (though it's called a tree, it is actually more like a shrub). Native to England, sloes look like giant purple grapes and grow wild at the edges of fields and woods throughout continental Europe.

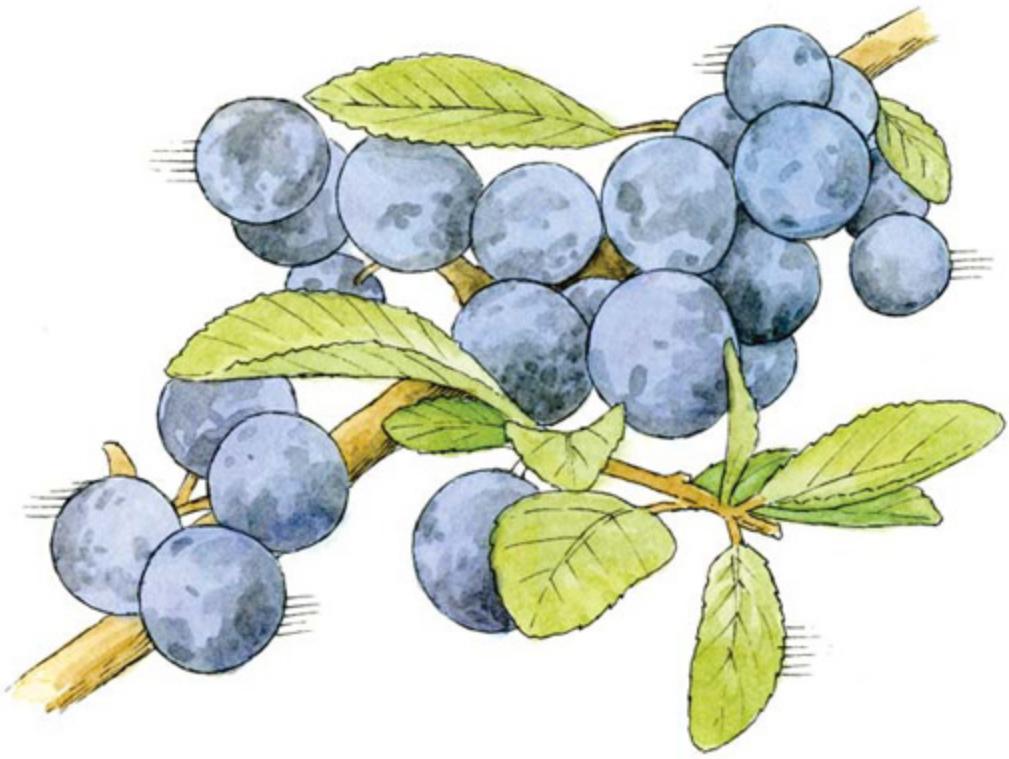
Every summer my wife, daughter, and I go to her family's home near Košice, to a village surrounded by woodlands and pastures. Years ago, on a pleasant day in early August, I took off on a hike without a map or any fixed destination, instead relying on nature to guide me through the forest and to what I hoped to find: lots of wild mushrooms. Of course, nature led me onto a rambling path until I got good and lost.

After a few hours, I found myself in the thickest woods I have ever trudged through. I came to some black hawthorn bushes and spotted low-hanging fruits that looked like either small plums or giant blueberries. I twisted one from a branch and popped it into my mouth. Seconds later my mouth was stripped clean by the astringent tannins and went into a pucker that lasted long enough to make a permanent imprint. Anyone who has ever foraged for sloes knows you don't collect them until after the first frost, once the fruit has a chance to gather its sugars for a full season and nearly fortify, like grapes destined for ice wine.

I had mistakenly made the connection between the sweet flavor of a sloe gin fizz and the actual raw sloes, which, even in season, hardly taste like the "sloe gin" available in the States. A sloe gin fizz was one of the first mixed drinks I ever tasted. (At the time, I thought that "sloe gin" was so named to describe the time it took to mix the drink!) Commonly made with artificial flavors, domestic sloe gin is a far cry from the complexity and nuance of the real thing.

A few years after the mouth-puckering incident, during an autumn visit to my in-laws, I again found myself wandering until somehow, miraculously, there I was in the same thicket, with the same bushes. This time I knew what I was looking at when I snapped the dark berries from their branches. I carried the berries in my satchel, back to the family, already tasting the blushed sloe gin they were destined to become.

To this day, sloes remind me that sometimes getting lost is better than knowing the way.



Sloe Gin

MAKES 1 LITER (ONE 33-OUNCE BOTTLE)

Made in early to midautumn, sloe gin has a curing time of about 4 months, though many who make it break out a bottle early, as its cranberry-colored tint makes it a perfect winter holiday aperitif. Tradition calls for using the thorny branches of a sloe bush to prick the berries to release their juices. (I use a stainless-steel needle.) Sloe gin is excellent in a classic sloe gin fizz or sipped over ice with a wedge of lime. After decanting the gin, save the fruit to make a wonderful fortified wine and a sublime sloe royale (see Note).

Use a nonreactive needle (or a prickly sloe branch) to make tiny holes in

2 pounds sloe berries

Put the berries in a 2-quart jar and cover with

1¼ pounds sugar

Tightly twist on the lid, vigorously shake the jar, and set it on a sunny windowsill for 5 days, turning the jar over daily (yes, some days the jar will be upside down). During this time, the sloes will release their juices to make a thick, intensely purple slurry.

DAY 5

Open the jar and cover the berries with

1 liter cheap gin (save the gin bottle for bottling the sloe gin)

Screw on the lid and put the jar in a cool, dark place for 3 months. After that time, open the jar and pour the dark crimson and somewhat almond-flavored elixir through a fine-mesh sieve into the clean gin bottle. Set aside the sloe gin for another month before drinking.

NOTE: Save the sloe mash that is left in the sieve to make a sloe-infused jug of wine. Pour off about 2 glasses from a jug of white table wine (cook with it or drink it if you're not too fussy). Add the sloe mash to the jug along with ½ cup of sugar. Tighten the cap, shake the jug vigorously to combine, and then put it in the refrigerator for 48 hours to infuse. To serve, pour the wine over ice and top off with sparkling wine or seltzer. Be sure to warn your guests about the sloe pits!

Crab Apples

MOSTARDA IS A CLASSIC SWEET AND PUNGENT, mustard-flavored candied-fruit condiment that originated in northern Italy, specifically in Cremona, which is just under 40 miles southeast of Milan. It is made from gorgeously sugar-glazed whole fruits, such as cherries, apricots, and my favorite, crab apples, and is a traditional accompaniment to bollito misto or roast pork.

I got into making mostarda after a fall session at the Greenmarket when I saw a huge basket of crab apples, those little palm-size green-red apples that aren't sweet enough for eating out of hand but when cooked have an intense apple flavor. Looking at these perfect apples in miniature made me

want to buy the whole load. Once I got back to the kitchen, I didn’t want to chop them up (their charm lies in their minuscule form). I thought of mostarda and its beautifully preserved orbs of fruit.

Making this traditional condiment of whole fruit suspended in a sweet-savory syrup is an excellent use for all sorts of underripe produce, and consequently was a way for farmers to sell less than perfectly ripe fruit. Monks and other highly skilled artisans took it from there and began preserving the fruit in syrup, thereby creating a commodity that wouldn’t spoil and could be traded throughout the winter, when there wasn’t any fresh fruit to harvest. Their ingenuity led to one of the most incredible flavor bombs. It celebrates seasonality in a unique and timeless way, with the sweet fruit and syrup undercut by a bracing shock from the horseradish.

Crab Apple Mostarda

MAKES 2 QUARTS (FOUR 16-OUNCE JARS)

The key to making a good mostarda is to select fruit that's slightly underripe, so it stays intact during the cooking process. Naturally tart and tannic fruits, such as crab apples and clementines, provide the most balanced flavor. The procedure for making mostarda may seem time consuming, but after the initial preparation, it requires only 5 minutes a day for a week to complete it. I often include mostarda on a cheese board, alongside a hard mountain-style cheese such as a nutty tomme or a sharp Parmigiano-Reggiano, either of which stands up to mostarda's boldness.

Stack two 4-inch-square pieces of cheesecloth. In the center place

- **1 (1½-inch) piece fresh horseradish root, peeled and sliced into three rounds**
- **½ cinnamon stick**
- **¼ cup brown mustard seeds**

Gather the ends of the sachet and secure with a piece of butcher's twine. Put it in a large heavy-bottomed pot and add

- **4 cups water**
- **1 pound sugar (about 2½ cups)**

Over medium heat, bring the water to a simmer, stirring occasionally until all the sugar is dissolved. Let simmer for 10 minutes longer. Increase the heat to high and boil for 2 minutes, to reduce.

While the liquid is reducing, with a sewing needle or a stickpin, poke at least a dozen holes in each of

- **2 pounds crab apples**

Put the crab apples in a 1-gallon ceramic, glass, or food-grade-plastic container (one that has a lid), and immediately pour the hot liquid

(including the spice sachet) over the fruit. The fruit should be submerged. (If there's not enough liquid, make a simple syrup by dissolving equal parts of sugar and water over medium heat and then bringing the mixture to a boil. Pour in as much as you need to cover the fruit.) Cover the container with the lid and leave on the countertop for 24 hours.

DAYS 1–4

The next day, wearing gloves, strain the fruit through a fine-mesh sieve, separating the crab apples from the syrup. Return the crab apples to the container. Pour the syrup back into the pot, add the spice sachet, and bring to a boil. Cook the syrup over high heat for 30 seconds and then immediately pour it over the fruit. Cover the container and set aside for another 24 hours. Repeat the drain-boil-cover step every day for 4 days (you'll be keeping the fruit in syrup for a total of 5 days).

NOTE: Always wear gloves and make sure all the equipment is scrupulously clean, so no unwanted bacteria contaminate the mostarda.

After a few days, you may not have enough syrup to cover the crab apples. This is a good thing: it means the fruit is absorbing the syrup, which will give it a distinctive, delicious flavor and a glassy appearance.

DAY 5

On the fifth day, use tongs to remove one crab apple from the container. Slice it in half and check to see if the fruit is candied and rosy red all the way to the core. If it is, you're done. If the sample crab apple is not candied to the core (meaning the red blush doesn't extend as far as you want), continue the strain-boil-cover step for another 2 days. At this point, the fruit will definitely be candied.

To store the mostarda, remove the spice sachet and either divide the mostarda into two sterilized 16-ounce jars (see page 19) and refrigerate for up to 6 months or follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and

process the jars for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bath and store them in a cool, dark, dry place for years.

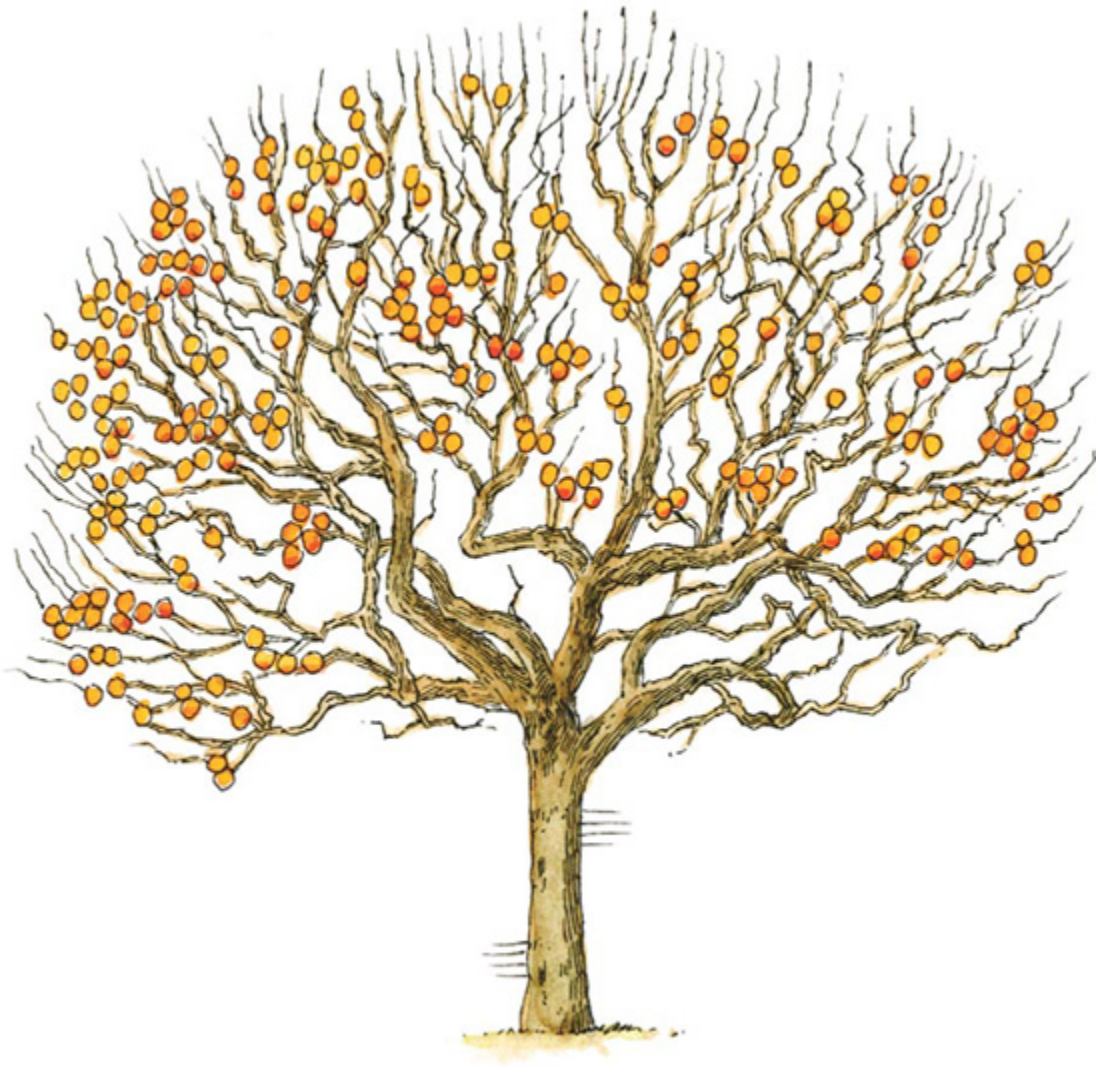
NOTES: The procedure for making mostarda is always the same, no matter what kind of fruit you use, but the number of days required for it to absorb enough syrup will vary. Small and soft fruits — cherries, apricots, and sugar plums, for example — average 5 days and larger and denser fruits — pears, navel oranges, and quince, to name a few — will need up to a week to candy.

If any of the fruit bursts while it's cooking, don't worry: that won't cause any harm or alter the flavor.

Feel free to experiment by combining various spices in the sachet. Mustard seeds and horseradish are essential, but you can substitute 1 teaspoon of anise seeds (especially nice for a sour cherry mostarda), 6 allspice berries (used in pear mostarda), or 3 whole cloves (paired with navel oranges) for the cinnamon stick.

Wild Persimmon

THE GNARLED, ANGUISHED BRANCHES OF a wild persimmon tree are nature's way of saying Danger, back off! to foragers who are tempted by the handsome fruit. Only the initiated know not to pluck a less-than-jelly-ripe persimmon: "It'll scrape the hair right off your tongue" is an apt way to describe what a premature persimmon will do!



My aunt and uncle live on a stunning plot of land on the under-shelf of the Blue Ridge Mountains and inherited a wild persimmon tree when they bought the property. When I asked my aunt, who is no stranger to the awesome bounty of our botanical world, if she had tried the fruit, she said they were horrible and not worth the trouble of reaching up to pick.

As a fruit to eat out of hand, I couldn’t agree with her more. It’s only when the wild persimmon is so ripe that it falls from the tree on its own that its earthy spice and its singular sweetness come out to play. The once horrible-tasting fruit is then an ideal candidate for preserving as a delectable spoon fruit that is quite special and rare, a perfect preserve for celebrating winter holidays.

Nutritious wild persimmons (they’re a good source of vitamin A) are native to the Americas and were an important food source for Native Americans and new-world colonists. Unlike Asian persimmons (Fuyus and Hachiyas), American wild persimmons are small and stay excruciatingly tannic until they are so overly ripe that they become a quivering, wonderfully apricot-like jelly held in a sphere only by its thin papery skin. The best way to tell if the fruit is just right is to let it fall from the tree, which happens anywhere from late August to mid-November, depending on the variety of the tree and the geography. Even after the first frost, I’ve harvested particularly stubborn fruits that were clinging to the tree with acute separation anxiety. These persimmons are nature’s late-season olive branch, a peace offering to hold you over until the next harvest.

Wild Persimmon and Ginger Jam

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

Much of what makes this jam so memorable is the sweet and syrupy chopped and candied ginger, which adds heat to the already warm, spicy flavor of the persimmons. Often I’ll make a double batch of the ginger and store the leftovers for quick ice cream sundaes or to punch up a pie or cobbler. This jam spooned on warm, fresh-baked scones and covered with clabber cream (see page 98) makes me happy to be alive.

CANDIED GINGER

In a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, bring to a low simmer

4 cups water

1 (8-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled and chopped into ½-inch chunks

Cover the pot and cook until the ginger is very soft, about 45 minutes. Stir in

2 cups sugar

Continue to cook over low heat until the liquid is reduced to about 1½ cups and is thick and golden, about 30 minutes longer. Squeeze in the juice from

½ lemon

Use a fork to fish out a piece of ginger. It should be more tender than chewy, with very little of its fibrous feel remaining. If it is too tough, add another ½ cup water and cook for 15 to 20 minutes longer. Taste the ginger occasionally, until it's tender. Set aside.

THE JAM

Pull off the stems from

2 pounds fresh-picked, overripe wild persimmons (or very ripe Hachiyas)

Put the fruits in a conical ricer, china cap, or fine-mesh sieve over a bowl and press the very ripe persimmons through to separate the pulp from the skin and seeds. You can also grind them in a food mill. This should yield 2–2½ cups of pulp. Transfer the pulp to a medium, heavy-bottomed pot and add

¼ teaspoon baking soda

¼ teaspoon ground cloves

With a wooden spoon, stir the mixture vigorously — it will begin to bubble and foam as the baking soda interacts with the fruit tannins and releases carbon dioxide. Stir in

1 cup sugar

½ cup candied ginger in syrup

Let sit for a few minutes until the sugar begins to dissolve and the mixture becomes a little looser. Turn the heat to low and cook, stirring often to prevent the bottom of the jam from scorching, until the pulp darkens and loses it translucency, about 15 minutes. *Do not let the jam come to a boil.*

Spoon the jam into four sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19) and refrigerate for up to 3 months, or follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

CLABBER CREAM

MAKES ABOUT 5 CUPS

It used to be that unless you owned a cow, most of the dairy you consumed was in one sour form or another: buttermilk, crème fraîche, sour cream, or thick and tangy clabber cream. There's something to be said for the way that the microbes work on dairy products to keep them from spoiling. It's as though before pasteurization, dairy naturally preserved itself. The slow process of souring raises the acidity of a dairy product and protects it from harmful bacteria. In fact, the bacteria that do grow are the good ones — think of them as the original (and free!) probiotics — that are critical for good digestion.

In a large bowl, mix

4 cups heavy cream

1 cup buttermilk

Cover loosely with a piece of cheesecloth and set aside in a warm place for 7 days, stirring every 2 days. After a week it will be crème fraîche. To turn this into clabber cream, pour it onto a double layer of cheesecloth, gather the corners, secure with twine, suspend over a large bowl to catch the liquid, and refrigerate overnight. The next day, untie the cheesecloth, scrape the clabber cream into an airtight container, and refrigerate for up to 1 week.

Quince

COMMONLY THOUGHT OF AS THE "forbidden fruit" of the Bible, quince looks like the offspring of an apple and a pear as imagined in a Georges Braque painting. It's inedible in its raw state, but cooking miraculously transforms

it. Heated slowly over a low flame, its bitter and excruciatingly solid pale flesh turns amber and tender, smooth, and tinged with the soft and floral honey notes of a sophisticated Sauternes. You might say that its beautiful ruby hue is the summer sun captured and returned.

Ruby Red Membrillo

MAKES AN 11- BY 18-INCH SHEET PAN

Quince slowly cooked with sugar and wine and then baked in a just-warm oven overnight becomes *membrillo,* a sweet, ruby-red fruit paste that is a treat on a piece of toast or served with a sharp winter sheep's-milk cheese, such as the classic accompaniment, Spanish Manchego. I cook quinces with peels and cores to enhance the flavor, color, and the gelling properties of the paste. The most flavorful and beautiful membrillo requires patience. Cook it low and slow to be rewarded with the brightest fruit pâte.

Set a pot on top of a big sheet of waxed paper and trace a circle around it. Cut out the circle and set aside. Peel and core

3 pounds quince

Put the peels and cores in the center of a 12-inch-square piece of double cheesecloth with

2 whole cloves

½ cinnamon stick

Gather the ends of the spice satchel, tie with butcher's twine, and put into the large pot. Chop the quinces into 1-inch cubes and add them to the pot with

2 cups sugar

¾ cup water

½ cup fruity white wine (such as the Spanish Albariño)

Set the waxed-paper circle on top of the quinces and cover with a plate to weight it down. Over medium-low heat, bring the liquid to a gentle simmer. As soon as it starts to simmer hard, reduce the heat to low and cook, stirring occasionally, until the quinces are soft and the cooking liquid is syrupy, 1½ to 3 hours. The longer you cook it, the better it is.

Drain the fruit through a sieve over a medium bowl and reserve the cooking liquid. Transfer the quinces to the bowl of a food processor. Wearing gloves and using tongs, hold the spice sachet over the quinces and squeeze as much liquid from it as possible. Begin to puree on high speed, drizzling in the reserved liquid as necessary to achieve a silky-smooth paste (like apple butter).

Preheat the oven to 160°F. Lightly coat a rimmed baking sheet with pan spray and, with a rubber spatula, transfer the quince puree to the baking sheet, smoothing the surface to create an even layer. Firmly hit the bottom of the sheet pan flat against the countertop several times to condense the paste and knock out any air pockets. Put it in the oven overnight (about 8 hours).

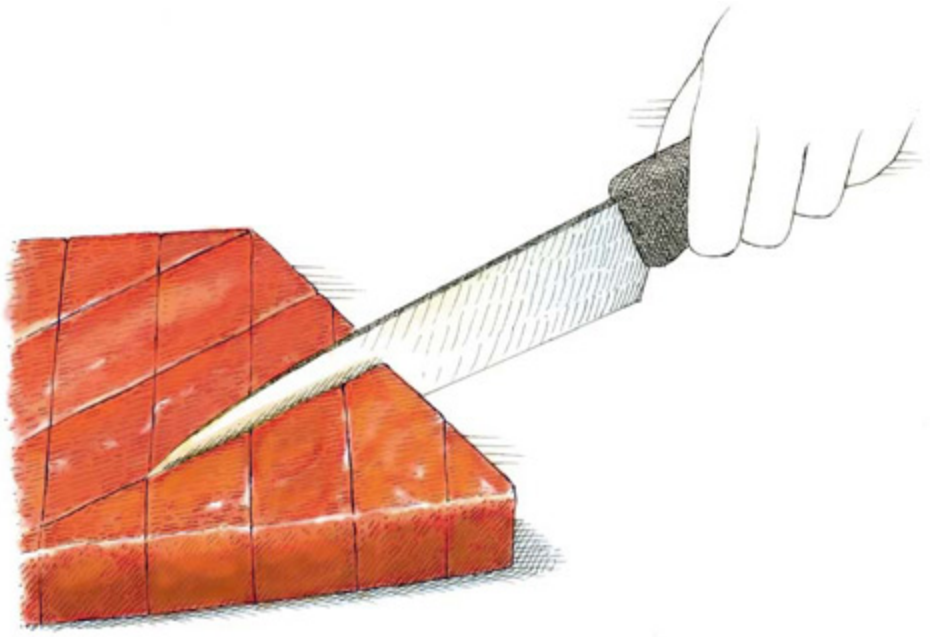
(If your oven's lowest setting is 200°F, cook the membrillo with the door ajar for 2 hours, then turn off the oven, close the door, and let it cook in the residual heat until morning, about 8 hours longer.)

Remove the membrillo from the oven and set it aside to cool, about 2 hours. Run a paring knife around the edges of the pan. Put a flat platter (or a large baking sheet or cutting board) on top of the pan and then invert it so the paste falls out onto the platter.

It's best to slice just the membrillo that you need and refrigerate the rest in a solid block. I slice the membrillo into diamond-shaped pieces: Cut the membrillo into 2-inch-wide strips, then make a diagonal cut from the upper-right corner to the lower-left corner. Continue slicing strips at a 45-degree angle at 1-inch intervals to create the diamonds. (You can create portions any way you want to; try cookie or biscuit cutters to stamp out shapes.)

To store, tightly enclose the membrillo in a big piece of plastic wrap or waxed paper and refrigerate. It will keep for up to 1 year.

NOTE: When you bite into a fresh piece of fruit, there is a delicate interplay between the sweetness of the flesh and the bitter tannins and esters found in the skin. When the skins are removed for cooking (who wants to bite into a rubbery-skinned pear?), we lose the balance and the dynamism of the fruit. That's why I put the skins, seeds, and stones into the poaching brew, safely tucking them into a sachet so I can easily take them out. The castoffs add a tremendous amount of flavor and pectin. You'll be amazed with the results.



Eggs

EGGS ARE ONE OF THE ORIGINAL FORAGED FOODS. Before chickens and ducks were domesticated, finding a nest full of newly laid eggs guaranteed protein to the lucky person who claimed them. The problem of having too many eggs emerged with domestication. Once we were living side by side with our feathered friends and had a surplus of eggs on our hands, thoughts turned from eating them immediately to how to preserve them.

Cultures throughout the world have found ways to hold eggs for weeks and even months. In pubs across England, Australia, and the American South, it's common to see pickled eggs submerged in a briny liquid in a mason jar

set on the bar as a snack (sometimes beets are added to tint the eggs pink). Throughout China, hundred- or thousand-year-old eggs are preserved with clay, ash, and rice hulls. Over time, the white turns to a black jelly and the yolk becomes a chalky gray with a creamy texture and a pungent flavor.

Speckled Tea Eggs with Star Anise and Ginger

MAKES 1 DOZEN TEA EGGS

My favorite way to preserve eggs is to steep them with tea leaves and spices. While the eggs boil, their shells crack and the tannins from the tea leaves seep in, causing the eggs to take on a marbled appearance. Peel away a shell and you have edible art. Once cooked, refrigerate the eggs in the shells and in the cooking liquid for up to 1 week. They're lovely in the afternoon with a nice cup of black oolong tea.

In a large pot, bring to a boil

- **3 quarts (12 cups) water**
- **1½ cups red wine vinegar**
- **1½ cups dark molasses**
- **½ cup fish sauce**
- **12 unpeeled garlic cloves, smashed**
- **3 (2-inch-long) fingers fresh ginger, sliced crosswise into 1-inch-thick pieces**
- **6 star anise pods**
- **2 black-tea bags**
- **2 cinnamon sticks**

Using a slotted spoon, one at a time, add

- **12 eggs**

Reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and cook the eggs for 30 minutes (if the eggs crack, that's okay — even desirable — as that's what will create

the marbled stain). Turn off the heat and let the eggs cool in the pot, about 2 hours.

Transfer the eggs to a deep container, pour in the cooking liquid to submerge the eggs, cover the container, and refrigerate up to 5 days.

To serve, use a slotted spoon or tongs to remove an egg from the liquid. Peel away the shell, admire the intricate pattern, and enjoy.

Fresh Cheese

THE DISCOVERY OF PRESERVING MILK AS CHEESE is to me one of civilization's finest accomplishments. I can only imagine the look of surprise on a nomad's face when, after a long journey, he developed a thirst, untied a pouch (made from an animal's rennet-laden stomach) into which fresh milk had been poured that morning, only to discover tender curds bobbing in milky whey. The whey still did its job of hydrating, and the curd

satisfied on a deeper level. That's how I suppose cheese was born, probably in ancient Egypt or Babylonia, around 5000 BCE. It gives me great pleasure to know that artisanal cheese making today thrives around the world.

The mellow flavors of fresh cheese, still soft and squeaky, taste of the pasture, as wistful as a memory. It is redolent of the herbs, grasses, and flowers upon which the cows, goats, and sheep thrived in the springtime (as in chévre) and sustained in the winter (as in hardy, cave-aged cheese such as Swiss Gruyère). It only makes sense to treat this special concoction as gently as it was conceived, spooning it onto yeasty toast, drizzling it with honey, or perhaps sprinkling it instead with fresh-cut herbs.

I make cheese in the tradition of our ancestors, with as little futzing as possible. Simply put, cheese forms when the proteins in milk are forced to separate and curdle into the fabled curds and whey. Curdling can occur either using rennet (which comes from the lining of an animal's stomach) or an acid, such as vinegar or fresh lemon juice. I prefer vinegar — it's easy to use and less expensive than rennet. Note, though, that cheese made without rennet cannot be aged — it must be consumed fresh. Along with the best milk you can find and just a touch of sea salt, you can make something that speaks of history yet tastes as fresh as a new day.

Farmer Cheese

MAKES ½ POUND (1 CUP)

I always have a fresh round of soft ricotta-like farmer cheese in my refrigerator. It's so simple to make, and excellent anytime, whether spread on buttery toast for breakfast or enjoyed for dessert with figs and honey. One of my favorite things to do is reunite the landscape of the pasture on a salad plate. Bring elements like foraged dandelion greens or lamb's-quarters, farmer cheese, pears, or figs together for a salad that speaks for time, place, and season.

In a medium pot over medium heat, put

- **4 cups whole milk**

1½ cups buttermilk

1 tablespoon distilled white vinegar

Warm the milk mixture until it reaches 175°F on a digital thermometer (the milk will be almost to a simmer), then turn off the heat, cover the pot, and set aside until the mixture separates into curds and whey, about 45 minutes.

Carefully ladle the mixture into a cheesecloth-lined sieve set over a large bowl. When the whey has dripped into the bowl, lift the cheesecloth and transfer the curds to a medium bowl. Using a wooden spoon, stir in

1 tablespoon sea salt

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate until chilled. It can stay in the refrigerator up to 2 weeks.

Lamb Prosciutto

THE PROCESS OF CURING MEAT goes back years to ancient civilizations when people salted and/or smoked meats to draw out moisture and make them safe from bacterial growth. As time and men marched on, sausages and cured salamis were taken aboard ships to feed explorers destined for faraway lands. To preserve meat, two kinds of salt are commonly used: sodium nitrate and sodium nitrite (see page 112). The discovery of using these salts in preservation was probably made by the Romans, who found that salamis cured with a certain salt from a certain mine tasted superior to others. This is how the great tradition of Italian dry-cured meat was born, and I can’t imagine — nor would I want to — a world without spicy sopressata, herbaceous finocchiona, and perhaps my favorite, nutty prosciutto.

As a rule, prosciutto is the salt-cured hind leg of a pig or wild boar. And although I love all types of cured pork — *salumi,* bacon, ham, and the loin — I’d take the rich taste of lamb fat over pig fat any day, which is why I buck tradition and make my prosciutto with a whole leg of lamb. The taste is just one reason to use lamb: the other is that the leg of a pig takes 12 to

24 months to reach maturity. The leg from a lamb is ready for the slicer after a mere 2 or 3 months. Trust me — it's still a long wait!

Lamb Prosciutto

MAKES 1 PROSCIUTTO

All it takes to make a delicious lamb prosciutto is spices, salt, a semi-boned leg of lamb, and time. Experience and experimentation have taught me how to simplify the process: instead of measuring spices in $^{1}/_{16}$ teaspoons or hundredths of a gram, I make a big batch of the master spice-and-salt blend and then portion out what I need to cure the lamb. I keep it in the cupboard and use what's left to cure the next leg of lamb destined to become prosciutto. Do customize the spices for a different flavor profile, if you'd like. For a Mediterranean-flavored prosciutto, substitute cumin seeds and dried oregano for the fennel, allspice, and cloves. When switching spices, use an equal amount of the replacement spice and stay true to the salt-to-sugar ratio. For the lamb leg, I prefer a hoof-on leg. If your knife skills aren't superlative, ask your butcher to prepare the leg for you, removing the aitchbone and femur.

MASTER SPICE RUB

In a large skillet, heat

6 whole cloves, coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons coarsely ground black pepper
1 tablespoon crushed fennel seeds
½ tablespoon coarsely ground whole allspice berries

Heat the spices over medium heat, shaking the pan often, until they're fragrant and the fennel looks lightly browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer the spices to a large plate to cool. Once cooled, pour the toasted spices into a large bowl. Whisk in

1 (3-pound) box kosher salt

¼ cup sugar

1 tablespoon curing salt #1 (see page 112)

1 tablespoon curing salt #2 (see page 112)

zest of 1 lemon

Remove 4 cups of the master spice rub from the bowl and set it aside. Pour the remaining rub (about 2 pounds — enough to cure two more legs) into a glass jar with a lid and store in a cool, dark, dry place for up 4 months.

THE PROSCIUTTO

Evenly sprinkle ½ cup of the spice rub into the bottom of a 12- by 14- by 6-inch plastic container. On top of the spices set

1 (5-pound) semi-boned leg of lamb

Open the leg and rub the inside with ½ cup of the spice blend. Close the leg and rub another ½ cup of the spice blend (you have now used 1½ cups of the spices) all over the outside of the leg (thoroughly rub it into the top of the leg if the hoof has been removed). Firmly press on the leg to flatten it into its signature viola shape, cover the container, and refrigerate for 4 days.

DAY 5

Rub another ½ cup of the spice blend over the outside of the leg. Flip the leg over, press it down, cover, and refrigerate for another 4 days. Repeat this four more times, using an additional 2 cups of the spice blend over the next 16 days. After the last application of spices, let the leg cure in the refrigerator for 1 week. All this adds up to 4 cups of spices used over a 28-day cure. If you see a pool of liquid at the bottom of the container, don’t worry about it. This is normal and good.

DAY 28

Remove the leg from the refrigerator. Rinse under cold water and set it on a clean kitchen towel while you wash the container. Return the leg to the container, cover it with water, and put it back into the fridge for 24 hours.

At the same time the next day, remove the leg from the water and set it on a kitchen towel. Use another towel and thoroughly pat it dry, pressing down to ensure that there’s no water inside. Cut a 2-foot-long piece of butcher’s twine and pull up the ends to form a U-shape. Put the curved part of the U under the hoof (or where the hoof was) and bring the two loose ends up and over the hoof, passing them under the loop of the U. Pull the ends straight up to tie and secure the leg, then suspend it from a hook or a beam somewhere where it’s 75°F (in the kitchen near the range or in the attic) for 10 days. By now the lamb will blush to a pretty beautiful pink.

DAY 39

Move the lamb to a cooler, more humid environment. A room kept at about 60°F with at least 55 percent humidity is ideal: a basement, a shed, or a curing chamber. After 30 days, the meat will be that unmistakable pink we associate with ham. At this point, it's ready for you to slice with a meat slicer or a very sharp knife. Store the leg in the refrigerator for up to 3 months.

A Cure by Any Other Name . . .

Curing salts go by many names, but most often they have a numerical designator that indicates their use. Curing salt #1, for example, is a mixture of table salt, sodium nitrite, and pink coloring. It's also called Prague powder #1 or modern cure #1. Curing salt #2, which may be labeled Prague powder #2 or modern cure #2 (you get the picture), is a combination of table salt, pink coloring, sodium nitrite, and sodium nitrate.

The general rule of thumb is that if you're curing something for less than 30 days, such as hunter sausages and certain types of salami, you'll need just the nitrite-based curing salt #1 to eliminate moisture, thereby killing off bacteria so they can't multiply and spoil your sausages. Once you take on projects with a longer cure time, you'll need curing salt with nitrite and nitrate, curing salt #2. As the meat is slowly denatured, the nitrates convert to nitrites, meaning a longer-lasting cure for big cuts (such as prosciutto) that by virtue of their size require more time to cure.

Nitrites and Nitrates: What's the Deal?

There's some controversy regarding the use of nitrites and nitrates (which convert into nitrites), because nitrites in some types of cured meats when cooked produce nitrosamine, a known carcinogen. It's important to know that nitrates are commonly found in all kinds of food. Because they're naturally occurring minerals found in soil, anything that grows in the

ground probably has some level of nitrates in it, including spinach, beets, cabbage and other vegetables — as does water.

The question is whether the amount added to cured meats can cause harm — and the answer is no, not when the levels are a tiny proportion in relation to the weight of meat. This means enough nitrites are used to kill harmful bacteria (such as the ones that produce botulism) but not enough to harm people. Nitrite-cured bacon gets the most scrutiny because when it's cooked at a very high temperature, the level of nitrosamines increases. The solution is to not burn your nitrite-cured bacon. Or make a nitrite-free bacon (see page 161).

Bresaola

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO PUT UP MEAT: grinding up a whole muscle and stuffing it into some sort of natural or synthetic casing to make a sausage or salting down a whole muscle to cure it. This recipe calls for salting to make my version of *bresaola,* the classic Italian dried tenderloin. Though today we consider this a choice cut because of its tenderness and mild flavor (when sliced into thick round steaks, it's better known as filet mignon), in earlier days the tenderloin didn't get much respect. The beef tenderloin roast from which the filet is cut comes from deep within a cow and is a bit of a freeloader, not really helping the animal to move, breathe, or do anything else of consequence. Thus, as a relatively unused muscle, it's tender and mild-flavored, two attributes unappreciated by the Italians, who once considered it an off-cut that needed assistance to be made palatable. Only by curing the filet does it achieve "beefiness."

Times have changed, though, and now the filet roast is revered, making the price of curing *bresaola* quite expensive. Instead, I use an outer sirloin cut, which is not only more economical, but has better and beefier flavor as well.

Air-Cured Beef

MAKES 4½ POUNDS

Air-drying a sirloin roast for 5 to 6 weeks, until some of its moisture evaporates, concentrates the flavor of the meat, making it more unctuous, robust, and yes, beefy (think of the taste of prosciutto against that of a baked ham and you get the idea). You don't need special equipment to pull this off, just a cool, dry basement that averages between 50°F and 65°F. Thinly sliced on a mandolin, a few slices will satisfy even the most voracious meat lover. Or arrange on a plate with wild arugula, a few shavings of Parmigiano-Reggiano, and some good olive oil: a feast! If I have a few perfect fresh berries, I'll add those, too.

Using a coffee mill or spice grinder, make the spice blend by pulverizing

¼ cup sugar

14 juniper berries

⅛ cup fresh rosemary needles

3 tablespoons kosher salt

2 tablespoons whole black peppercorns

1 tablespoon coriander seeds

1¼ teaspoons curing salt #2 (see page 112)

1 piece star anise

Spoon half of the spice blend into an airtight plastic container, cover, and set aside. Transfer the remaining spice blend to a small bowl and add

4 garlic cloves, very finely minced

Evenly rub the garlic-spice blend into

1 (6-pound) beef sirloin roast

Tightly enclose the roast in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 7 days. Then remove the roast from the refrigerator, unwrap, and blot the surface with paper towels. Rub the reserved spice mixture evenly over the roast. Tightly enclose in fresh plastic wrap and return the roast to the refrigerator for 2 more weeks.

DAY 22

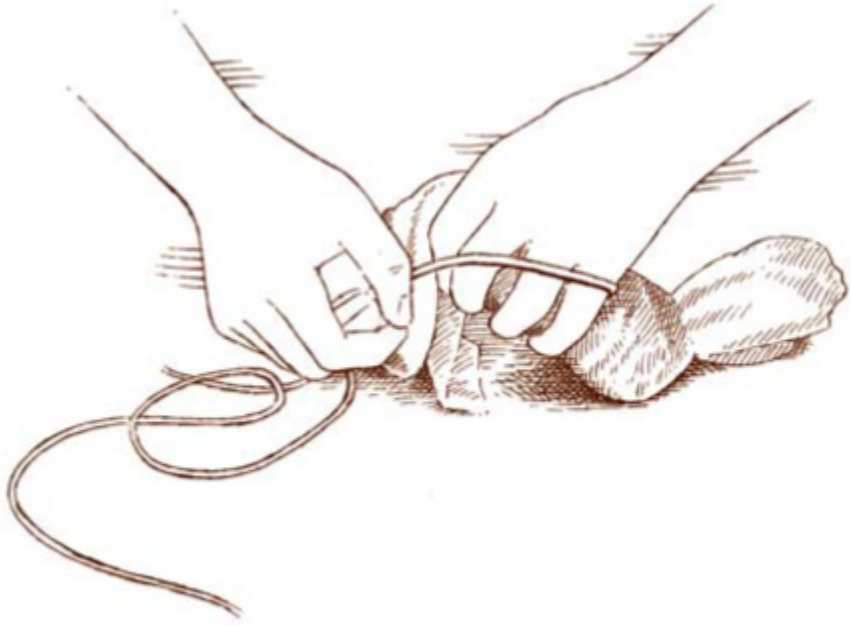
Unwrap the roast, use paper towels to blot the moisture, and rewrap in two layers of cheesecloth. Use about 24 inches of butcher's twine to secure and tightly truss the roast as pictured. Hang the roast from a hook in a cool, somewhat humid place between 50°F and 65°F, such as the basement or, ideally, your curing chamber (see Resources, page 247), until it becomes almost rock hard and develops a white bloom on the surface, 2 to 3 weeks. The meat will have lost 15 to 25 percent of its weight. After about 10 days, you'll start to see a white powder growing on the outside of the roast. Don't worry — this is *Penicillium* mold, which helps to protect the cured meat from drying out too quickly and spoiling.

NOTE: After 1 week if, when squeezed, you feel a hard skin (the pellicle), it is drying too quickly. To remedy, spritz the exterior of the cheesecloth with distilled water and place it in a plastic bag. Tie the bag shut and hang for 5 days. Remove the bag and continue the curing process as described.

DAYS 36–43

To prepare for serving, take the meat from the hook and set it on a cutting board. Unwrap and discard the cheesecloth and with a sharp knife, a mandolin, or a mechanical device, slice the meat very thin. Enclose the meat in plastic wrap and refrigerate. At this point, it has dried fully and will keep in the refrigerator indefinitely.

1. *Tie off one end of the sausage and then loop the string around the back of your hand.*



2. *Grab the roast with the same hand and let the loop go around the beef. Remove your hand and pull the loop tight around the roast. Repeat twice,*

spacing the loops by about 1 inches, until you have three bands wrapping the sausage.

3 GARDENS & FIELDS: CULTIVATED AND HARVESTED

WHEN HUMAN BEINGS LEARNED TO GARDEN, civilization began. Everything changed when we went from being random foragers to calculated pickers. To me, gardening in its most basic form is simply nurturing a plot of land, really, nothing more than pulling out a few weeds and checking in on what's growing every once in a while. The gardens I like the best still have

a bit of the wild in them and skim a delicate balance between premeditated and untamed.

The first gardening I ever did was companion planting. Learning how plants naturally take care of one another blew my mind. It makes absolute sense. Certain plants bring nitrogen up and others bring it down; they make the soil more hospitable for one another. It's this symbiotic relationship — not pesticides and herbicides — that nature came up with to nurture her own. Nature figured this out eons ago: it's up to us to understand the wild in the garden and the garden in the wild.

Say on a hike you find remnants of an old orchard — gnarled and twisted apple trees or long-ago planted and untended brambles of berries. Is this orchard really wild? Are you foraging or simply picking from a forgotten homestead? Are we enjoying the gardens of past societies? The slope on the way up to a well in my wife's village in Slovakia is covered with wild blueberries. Even though no one owns the berries and they're not part of what we think of as a garden, the act of collecting them is, in a way, gardening. What makes a plot of rough-and-tumble a garden? For me, the definition is this: If you know it's there and you tend to it, it's a garden. Are mushroom hunters who forage for chanterelles and morels and know where the best specimens crop up every year really just gardening wild mushrooms? Traditionally, we think of a garden as a staid plot, but we have an inherent desire to take care of what exists in the wild, and to me, this is gardening, too.

Cabbage

MY LOVE FOR SAUERKRAUT GOES HAND IN HAND with my love of rich smoked meats. I couldn't consume the quantity of smoked meat that I enjoy without 'kraut on the side. Because sauerkraut is pickled through lactic fermentation, it introduces a host of microorganisms beneficial to the body, a sort of a natural (and delicious) system regenerator. In curing and preserving, usually the objective is to reduce moisture content in order to ensure that nothing harmful lives in the food. With sauerkraut, though, you're essentially gardening beneficial microorganisms.

My wife’s four-foot-tall 90-year-old Slovakian grandmother is still charged with making the family’s annual supply of sauerkraut. She grows the cabbages in a plot outside of town, and come fall she harvests the heads, shreds them using a worn old wooden mandolin, and turns the ribbons into sauerkraut. On one side of her shed is a chest-high mound of potatoes and on the other is a wooden crate her husband built, where the ‘kraut is cured. She shuffles in and out every day to retrieve sauerkraut from the crate. It’s not a simple grab-and-go operation: She has to hoist a 40-pound boulder the size of a basketball off the top of the crate. Then she reaches in with her bare hands and pulls out what she needs, replaces the boulder, and off she goes.

This scenario, though quaint, is not unique. Some believe cabbage was the first vegetable to be cultivated. A multitude of cuisines cure this member of the brassica family, turning it into sauerkraut, *kimchi* and curtido, to name a few. Praised by ancient Greeks and Romans for its medicinal qualities, cabbage is still used as an anti-inflammatory in many cultures. Old traditions die hard — just ask my wife’s grandmother. Perhaps that is why sauerkraut in all of its interpretations graces the tables of the fanciest restaurants as well as the most humble of kitchens.

Old-World/New-World Sauerkraut

MAKES 1 GALLON (FOUR 32-OUNCE JARS)

All you need to make sauerkraut is a crock, some cabbage, salt, and a few weeks to let it ferment. I keep mine simple, flavoring it with only juniper and bay leaves. You can add other ingredients — try caraway seeds, fresh rosemary, even grated apple. However you choose to doctor it up, you’ll be rewarded with a delicious and healthy pickle that will last you all winter long. My family even drinks the “juice” for a shot of vitamin C to ward off colds.

Set on a cutting board

- **2 large heads green cabbage (about 5 pounds total)**

Slice into quarters and then, with a mandolin or a sharp knife, sliver them crosswise into very thin strips. Place the ribbons of cabbage into a large bowl and add

¼ cup kosher salt

8 juniper berries

3 fresh bay leaves

Put on a pair of rubber gloves and massage the cabbage lightly, until you see liquid beginning to build in the bottom of the bowl. Pile the cabbage into a sterilized 1-gallon crock or a heavy-gauge, food-grade plastic tub, packing it down as you go. Put a heavy plate on top of the cabbage itself and press it down until all the cabbage is covered by the liquid (be sure the crock is big enough so the liquid doesn’t spill over the rim).

Set the crock in a cool, dry, and dark place, cover with a water weight (see Note), and wait for 5 to 14 days. I like my sauerkraut best after 5 days, when it's half-sour. The cabbage will become more sour as it ferments, so taste it every day or two to see if it reaches your sour threshold. (To taste, remove the weights and the plate and, with clean tongs, extract some of the cabbage.) When it's ready, transfer the sauerkraut and its liquid to two sterilized, widemouthed quart glass jars (see page 19), cover, and refrigerate for up to several months.

NOTE: Making a water weight to put on top of the crock ensures that the cabbage stays completely submerged in its liquid, enabling it to ferment without spoiling. Half fill a small garbage bag with water and knot it securely. Place the water-filled bag in a second garbage bag and place this water weight on top of the plate that covers the cabbage.

LACTIC-FERMENTED MIXED PICKLES

MAKES 1 GALLON

This is another favorite pickle recipe. This time, I start with brine.

To make lactic-fermented pickled vegetables, put the following ingredients in a 4-gallon ceramic crock or food-grade tub

- **1 head green cabbage, halved, then each half quartered**
- **4 carrots, peeled, halved crosswise, and sliced into sticks**
- **1 bunch celery (leafy tops attached), sliced into sticks**
- **1 bunch fresh dill, divided into small sprigs**
- **24 peeled and smashed garlic cloves (about 3 heads)**
- **¼ cup sweet paprika**
- **¼ cup plus 2½ tablespoons kosher salt**
- **8½ cups cold water**

Mix with a slotted spoon, then weight down with plates and water weights (see page 122). Let the crock sit in a cool, dark, dry place for 5 to 10 days; taste after 5 days to see if they're how you like them. Refrigerate in smaller sterilized jars (see page 19) for up to 6 months.

Cucumbers

A book about preserving wouldn't be complete without a good version of dill pickles. For me the ultimate pickle is the Jewish deli pickle, like the ones I used to eat with my grandmother at the Carnegie Deli in New York City. I'd almost always order corned beef on rye (with a schmear of chopped liver, if I was feeling particularly adventurous). The best part of the meal was not the sandwich, but the pickle plate that preceded it. It consisted of a complimentary arrangement of full-sours, half-sours, and pickled green tomatoes. I'd start with the green tomatoes (so uncommon), and then go for the full-sours, my favorite kind of dill pickle.

The original Jewish deli pickle is lactic fermented, but for the sake of time and consistency, I make mine with a vinegar brine. No matter how you make them, for me the hallmark of a great dill pickle is its crisp snap. Many commercial pickling companies rely on alum, a trace metal, and other chemicals to help preserve this crunch. That's not my way; I make a refrigerator-style pickle (meaning you don't have to get out the boiling-water canner). The success of the pickles' snap relies on a quick chill. These classic dills are meant to be refrigerated and enjoyed right away rather than socked away in a pantry.

Classic Dill Pickles

MAKES 5 OR 6 QUARTS (TEN TO TWELVE 16-OUNCE JARS)

One of the keys to getting a crisp pickle is to limit the amount of time between when the cucumber is picked and when it goes into the jar. The cuke's cell structure slowly opens when it's off the vine, so an older cucumber will hold more water and be soft and weepy. A sure sign of a

fresh-picked cucumber lies with its skin — it should be studded with small spikes. In as few as a couple of days off the vine, the spikes break off.

In a large pot, bring to a boil

10 cups water
8 cups white vinegar
¾ cup kosher salt
⅓ cup coriander seeds
8 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons whole black peppercorns
2 tablespoons yellow mustard seeds
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
4 allspice berries
3 whole cloves
1 fresh bay leaf

In the meantime, fill the kitchen sink halfway with ice and water. In a 1-gallon ceramic crock or food-grade plastic tub, put

5 pounds small and well-scrubbed whole Kirby cucumbers
1 bunch fresh dill, broken into sprigs

Set the crock in the ice water. When the brine comes to a boil, turn off the heat and pour it over the cucumbers in the crock. Set a heavy plate directly on top of the cukes and press down, to submerge them in the liquid and add a water weight (see page 122). Once the mixture is completely chilled,

remove the water weight and the plate and divide the cucumbers, dill, and spices among five or six sterilized quart widemouthed glass jars (see page 19). Screw on the lids and refrigerate for at least 3 days, so the cucumbers can cure. They'll keep, refrigerated, for 3 months.

DIY Pickling Spice

For maximum flavor, buy fresh, whole spices and make your own pickling blend. These spices are classic for pickling: allspice berries, bay leaves, black peppercorns, red pepper flakes, coriander seeds, cloves, dill, garlic, and mustard seeds. This flavor profile is what the Western palate, especially for those with an Eastern European heritage, equates with "pickle." I use fresh bay leaves, which impart a fruitiness. It has a stronger flavor than that of dried bay leaves, so if you're substituting dried for fresh, use four times as much.

Watermelon

CUCUMBERS AND MELONS BELONG to the same family (Cucurbitaceae), so it makes sense that melons also taste great pickled. A melon's great achievement is that it can harvest water deep from the soil. It thrives in hot climates and has been prized for millennia; in fact, there is archaeological evidence that melons were depicted on Egyptian wall paintings, and watermelon seeds were often buried with the dead.

It took a few thousand years for watermelons to get to the Americas with European colonists and African slaves. The melon took well to the loamy soil of the American South, where every bit and scrap of the fruit was used to its best advantage. While everyone enjoyed the refreshing sweet flesh, it was the slaves who, from frugal necessity, mastered turning discarded rind into a delicacy unto itself.

Old-Timey Watermelon Pickles

MAKES 2 QUARTS (FOUR 16-OUNCE JARS)

Because of the melon’s ability to absorb liquid from the soil, it’s a prime candidate for pickling. Traditionally, a melon pickle is made with the rind, the part most people discard. Simply pare off the melon’s skin, remove the sweet flesh, and save the white, crunchy rind to pickle. Cantaloupe, muskmelon, and honeydew can all be swapped for the watermelon in this recipe.

In a large pot, bring to a boil

4 cups water

¼ cup kosher salt

Turn off the heat and pour the salted water into a medium bowl. Set the bowl in an ice-water bath to chill, then set aside. Put on a cutting board

1 medium watermelon

With a vegetable peeler, shave off the green skin to expose the white rind. Slice the melon into quarters and then use a sharp knife to follow the edge of the fruit where it meets the rind to separate them. (Chop up the fruit to snack on, or blend and strain for watermelon juice.) Cut the rind into ribs 3 inches long and 1 inch wide and set aside. Once the salted water is cool, put the rind in the liquid, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight.

DAY 2

Drain the rind and rinse it under cold water. Put it in a large pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil. With the heat still on high, boil until the rind starts to become translucent, about 15 minutes.

In a medium saucepan, bring to a strong simmer

1 cup apple cider vinegar

1 cup water

2 cups sugar

1 lemon, sliced into rounds

1 (4-inch) piece fresh ginger, sliced into -inch rounds

12 black peppercorns

8 allspice berries

6 whole cloves

3 tablespoons coriander seeds

3 tablespoons yellow mustard seeds

1 tablespoon fennel seeds

2 cinnamon sticks

2 fresh bay leaves

Pack the semitranslucent rinds into four 16-ounce jars.

Pour the simmering spiced simple syrup through a fine-mesh sieve set over a medium bowl, then pour it into a 4-cup (or larger) heat-safe measuring

cup. Pour the syrup over the rind in each jar and tightly fasten the lids. Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath. Store in a cool, dark, dry place. Once a jar is opened, refrigerate it; it will last for 2 months.

Friends of the present day are like the melon. You must try fifty before you find a good one.

— UNKNOWN PHILOSOPHER

Rhubarb

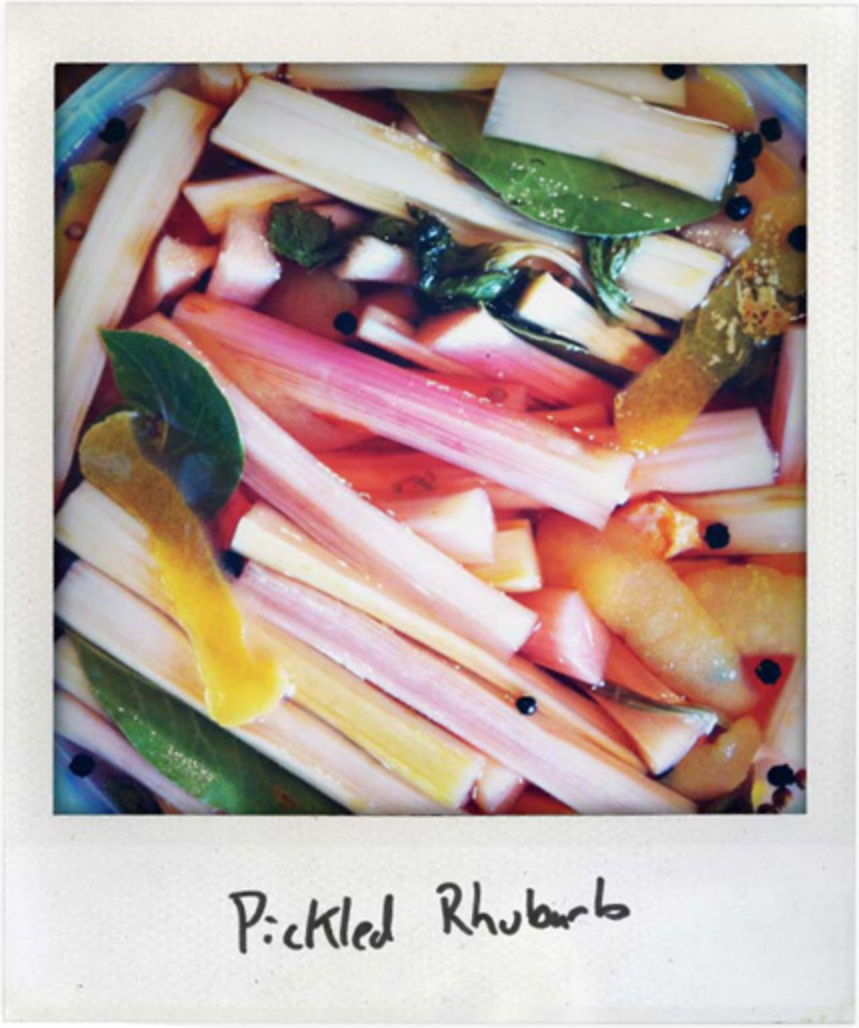
I GOT MY FIRST TASTE OF RHUBARB as a child when my family moved from the Washington, D.C., area to southern England for three years. The landscape was filled with ruins and bluffs, and I grew up on tales of ancient battles won and lost by kings and queens and their lords and knights — rich stuff for a seven-year-old. In the back of our house was a rambling, picture-perfect garden, rife with exotic vegetables such as purple broccoli, green damson plums, gooseberries, and lusciously red stalks of rhubarb. Every spring my mother attempted to anglicize my sister and me with the gooseberries and the rhubarb, turning them into countless varieties of the dessert known as a fool, a type of layered fruit and cream trifle that to this day is one of my great springtime pleasures.

While the sweet-sour pucker of rhubarb suits my palate, if left to its own devices, rhubarb will cook down to a stringy, slimy, and sour mess. To avoid this, I keep the rhubarb in good-size pieces and barely heat it so the pickled segments stay solid and firm, keeping their integrity. I'm also quite generous with sugar, a necessary addition for rhubarb to ascend to its potential. The resulting rhubarb pickle is a great accompaniment to a good hard cheese, grilled lamb chops, or as a topping for an exotic sundae. My favorite way to use them is in a twist on the classic caprese salad of fresh mozzarella, tomatoes, and basil. I plate it with a fresh, milky buffalo mozzarella, mint instead of basil, and the pickled rhubarb standing in for tomatoes. The flavor is absolutely spectacular and I'm fairly confident will convert at least some of the skeptics out there into rhubarb lovers.

Sweet Mint and Rhubarb Pickles

MAKES 1½ QUARTS (SIX 8-OUNCE JARS)

Rhubarb is one of the few seasonal pleasures that has not yet been imported for year-round availability. It may be tempting to buy some as soon as you see rhubarb piled in tinder-like bundles at a greenmarket, but hold tight: Wait until later in the season, when the once pale pink-green stalks are ruby red. There’s not much difference in flavor, but the color of the pickles will change dramatically if you use the intensely red ones.



Set on a cutting board

4 lemons

Slice the outer yellow rind from three of them, trying to avoid as much of the bitter white pith as possible. Scrape away any remaining pith and set aside the rind. Juice all four lemons and set aside.

Transfer the rinds to a medium saucepan and add

2 cups water

2 cups sugar

3 tablespoons whole black peppercorns

3 tablespoons coriander seeds

1 fresh bay leaf

Bring the simple syrup to a vigorous boil, reduce the heat to medium-low, and gently simmer for 5 minutes. Pour in the lemon juice and

¼ cup rice wine vinegar

1 bunch fresh mint, including stems

Return to a boil, turn off the heat, and steep for 10 minutes.

While the mixture is steeping, set on a cutting board

2 pounds rhubarb

Trim the rhubarb crosswise into 2-inch-long pieces and then slice each piece lengthwise into ¼-inch-wide sticks. Divide the rhubarb among six sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19). Pour the spiced simple syrup through a fine-mesh sieve over a medium bowl, then pour it into a 4-cup (or larger) heat-safe measuring cup. Pour the hot spiced simple syrup over the rhubarb in each jar and tightly screw on the lids. Set aside at room temperature overnight, and before storing, ensure the lids have properly sealed (the center of the lid will be taut without give). Store in a cool, dark, dry place.

RHUBARB FOOL

MAKES 4 PARFAITS

A proper fool is made by taking a sour fruit (or vegetable, in the case of rhubarb) and making it into a compote. It then gets topped or layered with a double helping of sweetened cream. My sister and I would sit down to eat this sweet after school, and whoever got to the sour fruit layer first would scream out “I’ve been fooled!”

Cut into 1-inch pieces

1 pound rhubarb stalks

Put in a heavy-bottomed medium pot and add

¼ cup Demerara sugar
2 tablespoons honey
1 teaspoon lemon zest

Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until the rhubarb breaks down, about 12 minutes. Turn off the heat and transfer to a medium bowl to cool, then cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until cold, at least 2 hours (and up to 2 days). Beat

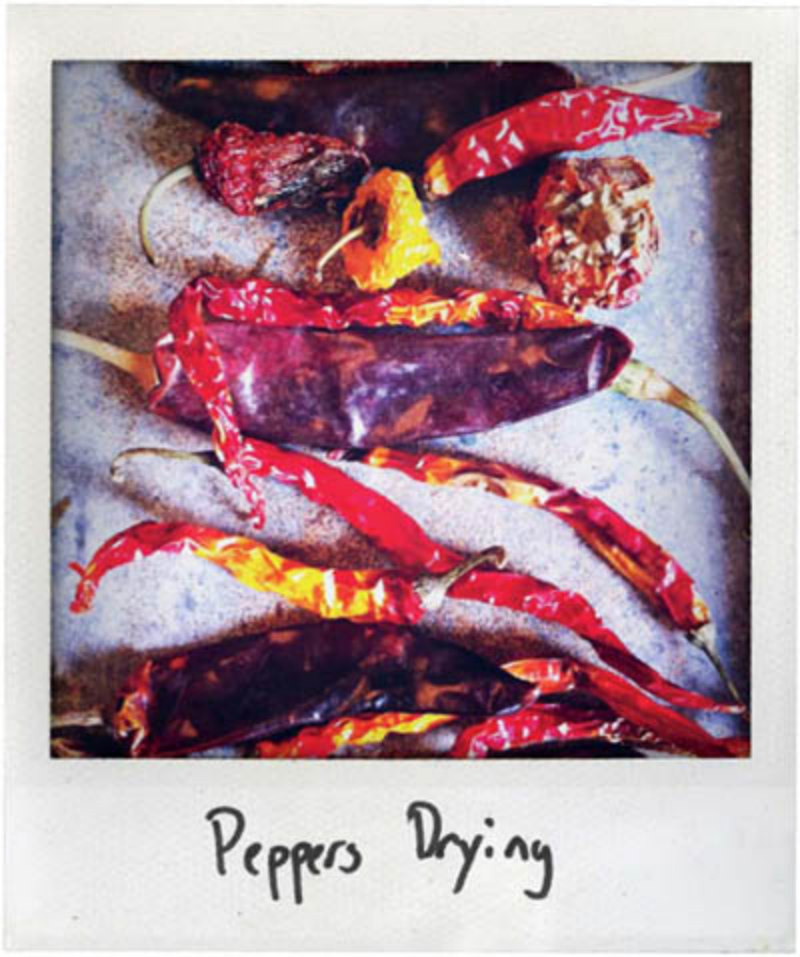
1 cup heavy cream
¼ cup confectioners' sugar
a scant ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

until the cream holds stiff peaks, 2 to 3 minutes. To assemble, spoon two dollops of rhubarb into four parfait or wineglasses. Top with 1 spoonful of whipped cream. Repeat, dividing the remaining rhubarb among the glasses and topping off with the remaining whipped cream. Serve immediately, or chill for up to a few hours.

Peppers

MOST OF THE RECIPES IN THIS BOOK are for small-scale pickling. The yields are designed to give the average forager, home gardener, and home cook six to eight small jars of conserves, pickles, or preserves. But for my delightfully enthusiastic daughter, Sarah, I devised this recipe for quantity — specifically, a peck of pickled peppers.

There was a time when anyone worth his or her salt knew the size of a peck, a bushel, a kenning (half a bushel), and a firlot (four pecks). Those quaint agricultural terms have unfortunately fallen by the wayside. These days, the only place you're likely to hear about a peck is at a pick-your-own orchard. It was on an outing to such a farm in upstate New York that I came up with this recipe.



The farm stand outfits visitors with a wagon to haul around the property and some half-peck paper bags to fill up with whatever produce you like. In the summer, that might be corn and tomatoes. By the fall, when it’s apple season and we make our annual pilgrimage, most of the summer vegetables are gone and the second crop of cabbages is not ready to pick. Some of the few vegetables in abundance, even at their peak, are the capsicums in all shapes, sizes, and degrees of heat.

While I was in the fields looking for poblanos, my favorite peppers, as well as any late, never-to-ripen green tomatoes still clinging to the vine in the brisk autumn air, my daughter was on a mad pepper scavenger quest. It didn’t take her long to fill up almost half of her red wagon with every pepper she could find. Some were ripe (some weren’t), some were spicy (we warned her not taste them), and many were sweet. An orchard is not a supermarket — you pick it, you buy it — so I couldn’t return half her load

to the fields as if they were boxes of those coveted (but forbidden) Lucky Charms. Instead, we took her haul to the farm manager and paid for the lot of them. One peck, to be exact. When we got home, this is what we made.

A Peck of Pickled Peppers

MAKES 8 QUARTS (EIGHT 32-OUNCE JARS)

These spicy-sweet pickles have become a staple of our pantry. I use them to brighten a simple meal of fried eggs or any leftover I come across in the refrigerator. You can use a mix of sweet red peppers and jalapeños or go for more exotic varieties, such as Hungarian peppers, cherry peppers, serranos, poblanos, cubanelles, or super-spicy habaneros. *Habanero alert:* Always wear gloves when cutting these, use at most two, and slice extra thin!

On the counter, set

10 pounds fresh mixed peppers (about 8 quarts)

Cut off the stem end from the large peppers and remove the seeds, then slice them lengthwise into thick strips. For the smaller peppers, with a paring knife make a slit in the bottom. If you're using any Scotch bonnets or habaneros, slice them crosswise as thin as possible. Divide the peppers among eight 1-quart widemouthed glass jars.

In a six quart or larger nonreactive pot, bring to a boil:

6 cups cider vinegar

6 cups water

¼ cup sugar

8 garlic cloves, sliced into thick coins

3 carrots, peeled and sliced into ⅛-inch rounds

2 Spanish onions, thinly sliced

4 fresh bay leaves, broken in half

3 tablespoons yellow mustard seeds

2½ tablespoons kosher salt

1 tablespoon allspice berries

As soon as the liquid comes to a boil, turn off the heat. With a slotted spoon, divide the garlic, carrots, onions, and spices among the jars, pour the brine into each, and tightly screw on the lids. Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Scented Leaves

WHEN I'M VISITING A GARDEN, I can't help but let my fingertips graze the leaves, occasionally rubbing one on my skin for the aroma imparted by its essential oils. I can smell the faint essence of the fruit or herb, be it a tomato leaf, a spindly shoot of lavender, or a rose petal.

Before international transportation made vanilla beans readily available, every good housewife knew how to use the leaves and flower petals from her garden to scent creams, cakes, jams, and jellies. Geranium leaves, for example, were traditionally used to scent butters that would be made into frostings for cakes. This is simply contact cooking: leaves are laid directly on butter, wrapped tight, and allowed to infuse overnight. Amazing, right?

Along with rose petals, scented geranium leaves are my favorite old-world culinary florals. There are many types of scented geraniums, from pineapple to ginger and rose, and each lends its own note to food. To know what kind of geranium you have, rub a leaf and then smell your fingertips. There should be an easily recognizable scent: lemon, perhaps, or orange, or mint. This is the essence that will be shared with the food.

This recipe takes that concept one step further: adding the bruised leaves at the end of the process enables the perfume to permeate the jam as it sets up in its jars.

Scented Geranium–Tomato Jam

MAKES 2 QUARTS (FOUR 16-OUNCE JARS)

Ginger- and pineapple-scented geranium leaves are my favorites to pair with overripe, perfect-for-jamming tomatoes. To get scented geranium, start your own seeds or go to a nursery for seedlings. Just make sure plants haven’t been sprayed with chemicals. This jam is great with hard, salty cheese and is a nice complement to a steamed or roasted piece of fish or a lightly grilled chicken breast.

On your work surface, set

5 pounds overripe tomatoes (preferably Beefsteak or Brandywine)

With a paring knife, remove the cores, then make a small X at the bottom of each tomato. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and set an ice-water bath next to the sink. Add the tomatoes to the boiling water, cook 20 seconds, and with a slotted spoon, transfer them to the ice-water bath.

Once the tomatoes are cool, peel the skins and put them on top of a large square of cheesecloth. (They add natural pectin to the jam.) To the skins, add

12 whole cloves

1 cinnamon stick

Gather the ends of the cheesecloth to make a sachet and tie with kitchen twine. Set aside.

Put a cutting board inside a rimmed baking sheet. On the cutting board, chop the tomatoes into bite-size pieces. You want the juices to run off into the sheet pan. Put the tomatoes, juices, and spice sachet in a 4-quart or larger nonreactive pot.

Add

3 cups sugar

½ cup water

2 lemons (rind included), thinly sliced, seeds removed

1 (2-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled and finely chopped

Over medium heat, slowly bring the ingredients to a simmer, stirring occasionally, and then let simmer, stirring often, until the tomatoes cook down, the mixture is thick, and the lemon rinds break down (you can help them along by pressing them against the sides of the pot as the mixture cooks), 1 to 1½ hours. Scoop up the spice sachet in a slotted spoon and,

with another spoon, press down on it to extract all of the liquid trapped inside. Stir in

½ cup scented geranium leaves (ginger or pineapple)

Cook to wilt the leaves, about 2 minutes, then divide the jam among four sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19). Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 20 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

When serving, remove the leaves: they contributed their flavor, but their texture is not appealing.

An Infatuation with Freshness

The idea of "freshness" is a postmodern concept that has caused excessive strain on our global food system. Before refrigeration, many fruits, especially delicate ones like tomatoes and berries, would not be expected to show up on the dinner table unless you lived on a farm or had a garden or access to a nearby orchard. Those delicate foods were always preserved. Underripe fruits were pickled; overripe ones were turned into jams, jellies, and marmalades. Both pickling and gelling help fruits reach their potential inside a glass jar. Fresh fruit was a luxury.

The age of refrigeration is just a blip on the timeline of history, a century, at most. But now that we take it for granted, our view of foods and their flavors is somewhat skewed. That is, certain foods were meant to be used only fresh, in season: nature's way. That's why you'll never see a tomato or a berry in the refrigerator at my house.

Cherries

THE ORIGINAL MARASCHINO CHERRY was created by Croatians who wanted to make good use of the Maraca cherry, a relative of the better-known Morello. The process involved soaking whole cherries in cherry liqueur to preserve them. The result was cherry-centric to the core (well, to the pit): the Dominican monks who perfected it at their apothecaries used not just

the sweet and meaty flesh but also the pits, the cherry tree bark, and the leaves. These elements gave the cherry preserve an almost nutty flavor. During the Industrial Revolution, probably with a nod to America's burgeoning antialcohol sentiments, a scientist developed a way to shorten the curing process without using liquor. Instead, a chemical-laden brew of calcium chloride, sulfur dioxide, corn syrup, and coloring gave the maraschino its signature firmness, sweetness, and "cherry red" color.

Instead of suspending the cherries in a thick corn-syrupy liquid loaded with food coloring, I use white wine, water, and pomegranate juice to get that deep red and the sweetness we're accustomed to. To get the color just right, I use sour pie cherries, which already have a jewel-like glow.

Modern-Day Maraschinos

MAKES 6 PINTS (SIX 16-OUNCE JARS)

Sour cherries are more delicate than Bing cherries and even Rainiers. It’s important to be selective when choosing the fruit, and even to opt for ones that are slightly firm and underripe rather than soft, and definitely not bruised. This care ensures that your finish-line maraschinos are intact and beautiful, suitable for topping a sundae or a Manhattan, whatever your preference.

The recipe itself is simple: just a spiced wine syrup that gets a faint hint of almond from crushed cherry pits and a splash of almond extract. The end maraschino is, I think, a more fitting representation of what the Croatian monks originally created.

Use a cherry pitter to carefully remove the stones from

3 pounds stem-on and firm sour pie cherries, rinsed and dried

Put the pits in a heavy-bottomed roasting pan or large skillet and set aside. Divide the pitted cherries among six sterilized 16-ounce jars, filling each to the brim.

Use another heavy-bottomed pot or pan to crush the pits until the white kernel inside is released (that's where the flavor is). Collect the smashed kernels and pits and put them on a large square of cheesecloth. Add

14 whole black peppercorns

12 allspice berries

thin strips of rind (without the white pith) from 1 lemon

Tie the cheesecloth with kitchen twine and put it in a large pot with

3½ cups sugar

3 cups water

1 cup pomegranate juice

1 cup dry white wine

Bring to a simmer over medium-low heat. Gently simmer for 20 minutes. Lower the heat if the liquid seems to be reducing too quickly (it shouldn't become syrupy). Add

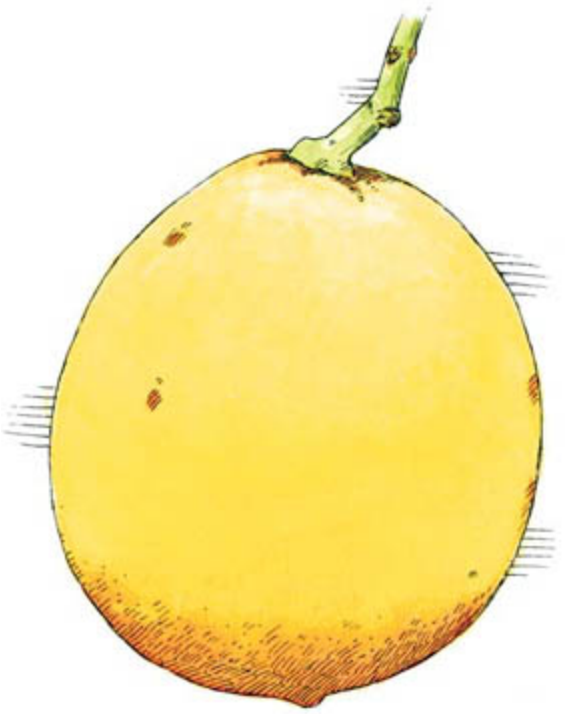
2 teaspoons almond extract

Increase the heat to high, bring to a boil, and turn off the heat. Strain the liquid through a fine-mesh sieve over a large liquid measuring cup. In the sieve, press on the cheesecloth spice sachet and the cherry pits to extract as much flavor as possible. Pour the piping-hot liquid over the cherries in each jar until the liquid reaches the lip, leaving ½ inch headspace. Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 20 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Bergamot Oranges

WHETHER OR NOT YOU REALIZE IT, you know bergamot. It's the key essential oil in Earl Grey tea's citrus-floral aroma, and its muskiness is tapped for the production of more than half of the perfumes made worldwide. The fruit itself creates a marmalade I think of as captured sunshine, a unique, bright flavor of sweet, bitter, sour, and savory.

Bergamot oranges are native to the Calabria region of Italy, but there are some growers on the West Coast who, in addition to farming bergamots, plant other delectable heirloom citrus varieties, such as the small Calamondin and the Seville Sour, the original marmalade orange.



Although I love all things locally grown, during winter in the Northeast, the options for that kind of fresh produce are limited, unless you're willing to cook with only apples, pears, potatoes, rutabagas, and turnips for four straight months. Kim Christensen, an orchardist who grows heirloom citrus outside Santa Barbara, introduced me to heirloom citrus and the concept that a world of heirloom-fruit varieties exists beyond heirloom tomatoes. She also sparked an appreciation for global strains that exist outside of the Northeast. Yes, I realized, it's important to buy, cook, and eat the bounty of locally based farmers. But it's also vital to support growers who struggle to

preserve diversity and vibrant stock, whether they're down the road or on the opposite side of the globe. These tireless farmers are preserving nature's bounty, in all its variety, for generations to come and are ensuring that citrus, beyond the standard navels, mandarins, and Lisbon lemons, continues to bear fruit.

Everyone thinks of citrus for its juice and fruit, but when you hold a fine specimen in your hand and smell it, the citrus becomes as much about its perfume, esters, oils, and bitter qualities. This is why bergamot marmalade is jamming perfection: you get to exploit the whole fruit. The citrus has enough pectin in it to jam naturally without added thickeners or gelling agents. The result is a preserve that's balanced and sophisticated in its flavor profile, which unfolds on the tongue in stages and offers a honeyed nuance that not many other fruits approach. It's an especially wonderful marmalade considering that you need just three ingredients: the bergamot oranges (rind and all), sugar, and water.

Sweet Bergamot Marmalade

MAKES 1¼ QUARTS (FIVE 8-OUNCE JARS)

Make sure the fruit and rind are thoroughly cooked before adding the sugar to the pot. Sugar extracts liquid from fruit (as salt does with meat and vegetables) and will make the rind toughen and shrivel before it has a chance to soften and reach its potential. Bergamots are in season in the fall and winter. They can be found regularly on the West Coast, in specialty-food markets, and through online sources (see Resources, page 247).

Put a small ceramic plate in the freezer. In a large nonreactive pot and over medium heat, bring to a boil

- **5 pounds Bergamot oranges, chopped (rind, pith, and all; remove seeds if you can)**
- **5 cups water**

Gently boil until the rinds are soft and slightly transparent, about 30 minutes. Stir in

5 cups sugar

Stir until the sugar is dissolved, then increase the heat to medium-high and cook for an additional 30 minutes. Remove the plate from the freezer and put a dollop of the jam onto it to test it. The jam should set up so that after 2 or 3 seconds, you can drag your finger through it, and it keeps its set nicely and doesn't run together or pool.

Divide the marmalade among five sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19), leaving ¼ inch headspace in each. Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath. Store in a cool, dark, and dry spot.

Plums

***LEKVAR*, AN EASTERN EUROPEAN PRESERVE** made from plums, may be the most primitive of all preserves. Rustic in its appearance and taste, it consists of nothing but boiled-down, very ripe fruit, skins and all. As uncomplicated as the process is, it produces a delicious preserve with deep fig and licorice undertones and a molasses-like sweetness.

Throughout Eastern Europe, in late summer, after the prune plums have been picked, villagers bring baskets brimming with the ripest fruits to the town center, where awaits an 8-foot by 3-foot copper cauldron set atop a crackling fire. The plums are stoned and dropped whole into the pot, and at five o'clock in the morning on the nose the cooking begins, to continue for 12 hours. During this time, the villagers take turns stirring the *lekvar* using a special L-shaped oar set on a center spindle. The paddle moves across the bottom of the pot in a figure-eight pattern, ensuring that nothing sticks and scorches. The plums slowly break down, until there is nothing left but an extremely thick glop of bubbling jam. At exactly five o'clock in the evening, the fire is extinguished and the town cache of lekvar is ready. Everyone grabs a crock and scoops up a mess of it to bring home. The crocks are covered with waxed paper or cheesecloth and put in the cellar. It will keep through the winter and indeed until the next harvest. The natural sugars and reduced water of the finished product miraculously don't require any more sealing or sterilizing to keep it safe. In fact, because the lekvar is

open to the air, it continues to dehydrate, until finally, when the next fall comes around, what's left at the bottom of the lekvar pot is a dense, sliceable paste (similar to the French pâte de fruits or Spanish membrillo) that is cut into little squares and handed out to children as candy.

Plum lekvar is used in baking all kinds of traditional pastries, from *kolache* (a sweet bread), *hamantaschen* (Purim cookies), the eponymous strudel known as *lekvarovnik*, *palicinky* (crêpes), and *buchti* (doughnuts). My favorite is the specialty of my beloved, who uses lekvar (we always have at least a jar or two in the cupboard) to make savory and sweet pierogi, delicious stuffed sheets of pasta that are somewhere between ravioli and dumplings. When she makes the more traditional potato pierogi, she often prepares more dough than potato filling. Rather than throw away the excess, she'll pinch off a dozen more dough balls that she'll turn into pierogies filled with lekvar. We either eat these separately, boiled and served with toasted bread crumbs and lots of butter, or throw them into the mix with the more traditional potato pierogi — surprise treats.

My mother-in-law taught me how to make a smaller version of lekvar. It doesn't require the village cauldron, but it's as close as you can get to the traditional inky plum preserve. Instead of stoning the fruits and cooking them whole or starting with whole plums and cooking them down for 12 hours, she puts uncooked plums (halved and pitted) through the medium die of her hand-cranked meat grinder, skins included. Genius! Grinding the plums encourages them to let go of their liquid so you can cook them without adding any water, meaning you get a more concentrated plum flavor in much less time. If you don't have a meat grinder, substitute many quick pulses in a food processor to achieve similar results.

Plum Lekvar

MAKES 1¼ QUARTS (FIVE 8-OUNCE JARS)

Lekvar can be made from different fruits, among them apricots, cherries, and grapes. What makes plum lekvar special is that both the skins and the flesh of the fruit are cooked down, which helps preserve the jam and keeps intact all of the essential vitamins of the fruit (which are concentrated in the

skin). The amount of sugar required for this recipe depends on the ripeness of the fruit, so after the lot is reduced to the consistency of a thick paste, taste it and add sugar as you see fit. The lekvar shouldn't be overly sugary, which is why this is such a great accompaniment to both savory and sweet applications.

Set up a meat grinder with the medium die. Grind

5 pounds very ripe prune plums, halved and pitted

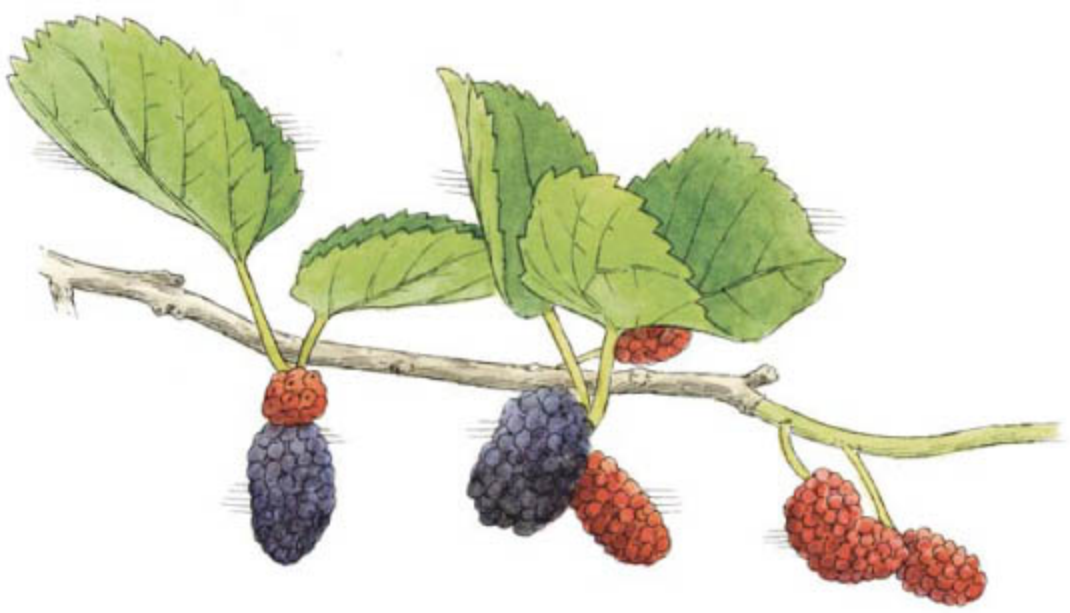
Put the milled fruit (pulp, skin, and liquid) in a large, heavy-bottomed, nonreactive pot (if you have one with a copper bottom, now is a great time to use it). Bring the plums to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Reduce the heat to low and gently simmer, frequently stirring the bottom and scraping down the sides to keep it from scorching, about 2 hours. Once the lekvar is very thick, taste it and add

¼–¾ cup sugar

Plum Brandy

In Eastern Europe, if you have a plum tree, you're definitely going to make two things with the fruit: lekvar and slivovitz. Slivovitz is a clear plum brandy, not unlike grappa, that is (to put it mildly) an acquired taste. Rarely have I had any version of it that retained even a hint of the fruit from which it was made, though for that matter, after I partake of glass after glass of this moonshine, I don't recollect much. In the village where my wife's *krstna mama* (aunt) and *krstny otec* (uncle) live, everyone has a few *slivka,* or plum trees, in his or her yard. My wife's *krstny otec* makes the angriest version of slivovitz I've ever encountered — I even confided to my wife that I thought he was trying to kill me.

The paste should taste sweet but not cloying. Continue to cook until you can drag a wooden spoon through it and leave a wake that takes 5 seconds to fill in. Divide the lekvar among five sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19). Screw on the caps to seal, then store for up to 6 months in a cool, dark, and dry spot.



Mulberries

IN EARLY SUMMER, the mulberries in my Brooklyn neighborhood hang low, sweet, and begging to be plucked. There used to be a giant white mulberry tree on a local university campus. Amid sculptures by both well-known and up-and-coming artists, the mulberry tree spread its branches, letting its fruit drop for whomever was lucky enough to be sitting nearby. I'd walk over with a giant canvas sheet and a burlap sack and collect the berries. Most of them never survived the two-block walk home; I'd pop them into my mouth faster than a kid with a bag of treats on Halloween.

Mulberry season reminds me to slow down, to picnic, to admire the nature around me, even when I'm in an urban setting with millions of other people rather than in the solitude of a shady garden. That's because the season passes quickly — blink, and the mulberries are gone.

As is what happened one summer when I took my annual walk to the mulberry tree. Gone. Vanished. Taken down and replaced by a sculpture. It's ironic to me that something of perfection — a fruit-bearing tree — was not recognized as a work of art itself. I miss that tree and the free banquet of summer-sweet berries it provided.

The fragility of mulberries makes them one of the ultimate local fruit experiences. It’s rare to see mulberries in a market, let alone a grocery store, as they don’t transport well. When I can find them, then, turning the mulberries into jam enables me to bring their tart flavor with me wherever I go.

Mulberry-Rosemary Jam

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

For an ultra-smooth jam, pass the fruit puree through a fine-mesh sieve after running it through the food mill. I like some seeds in the jam; they give it an interesting texture and remind me that the spread came from a whole fruit.

Put a small ceramic plate in the freezer. In a large nonreactive pot, with a potato masher, bruise

4 cups mulberries

1 (1½-inch) sprig fresh rosemary

Bring the mixture to a slow boil over medium heat, stirring often. Once the fruit has liquefied, 3 to 5 minutes, scrape the fruit into a food mill and churn. Continue to mill until the rosemary gets caught in the bottom plate. Remove the sprig and discard.

Return the berries to the pot with

4 cups sugar

juice of 1 lime

Bring the mixture to a boil over medium heat, skimming off any foam that rises to the surface. Remove the plate from the freezer and spoon a dollop of the jam onto it. The jam should set up so that after 2 or 3 seconds, you can drag your finger through it and it keeps its set nicely and doesn’t run together or pool. It takes about 30 minutes to get to this point (220°F on an instant-read thermometer).

Divide the jam among four sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19), leaving about ¼ inch headspace. Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 5 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Artichokes

ONE OF THE ONLY VEGETABLES I don't mind buying canned is the artichoke. Though they are delicious fresh, trimmed and steamed and served with a giant crock of melted butter, by preserving them *à la grecque,* or in the Greek style, the artichoke's briny and herbaceous notes are fully realized. If they are this good put up by someone else, why not do it yourself for even better results?

The artichoke is the flower bud of the thistle plant. Once picked, the prickly leafed, globe-shaped vegetable doesn't keep long and is best cooked and eaten posthaste. Most any vegetable can be preserved *à la grecque.* It means simply that ample olive oil, citrus juice, and herbs are used to suspend whatever is being pickled. Carrots, Romanesco zucchini, young turnips, and even mushrooms all benefit from this treatment. Just increase or decrease the cooking time according to the vegetable's density.

Preserved Artichokes à la Grecque

MAKES 2 QUARTS (FOUR 16-OUNCE JARS)

I like small, tender artichokes for this recipe. They're often called baby artichokes, which is a misnomer, as "baby" refers to something immature and these are fully grown. Because they grow low on the stalk, "baby" artichokes will never grow larger than the size of a golf ball. Nor do they have the hairy choke that covers an artichoke's heart (hence the name), which makes prepping these for preserving much simpler.

Pour into a large bowl

6 cups water

juice of 1 lemon and the squeezed lemon halves

Carefully snap off the tough outer leaves from

2 pounds baby artichokes

With kitchen shears, snip off any thorny points. Using a paring knife, carefully trim the base of the artichoke, peeling away the green skin and leaving the pale white stem intact. As you trim the artichokes, put them in the lemon water to prevent them from browning.

In a large pot over medium heat, warm

½ cup fruity extra-virgin olive oil

Add

1 onion, halved and thinly sliced
3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
zest of 1 lemon (juice the lemon and reserve the juice)
1 tablespoon coriander seeds
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
2 bay leaves
1 sprig fresh thyme

Cook the onion and spices, stirring often, until the spices are fragrant and the onion is soft, about 2 minutes (if the garlic or onion starts to brown, reduce the heat to medium-low).

Drain the artichokes in a mesh sieve, shaking off as much water as possible, and then add them to the oil. Stir to coat with the oil and spices and let them sizzle for about 1 minute. Add

6 cups water
2 tablespoons kosher salt

Increase the heat to medium-high and bring the artichokes to a simmer. Pour in

1 cup dry white wine

¼ cup rice vinegar

reserved lemon juice

Set a plate directly on top of the artichokes to submerge them and continue to cook until a paring knife slips into the base of an artichoke without any resistance, about 15 minutes. Stir in

¼ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

Tonic of the Gods

As someone who relishes all things traditionally procured and preserved, it's entertaining for me to track the ins and outs of food popularity among the ultra-particular New York dining crowd. A few years back, bitters became — and still are — all the rage. One of my favorite bitters, Cynar, is made from artichokes and has a syrupy, mouthwatering quality that somehow links it to its roots. The tonic, used as a purifying medicinal, takes its name from an ancient Aegean legend explaining how the artichoke plant came to be.

Cynara was a beautiful Greek maiden who was seduced by Zeus as he emerged from the sea on the isle of Zinari. They fell in love and she fled with him to Mount Olympus, where she was ordained a goddess. Cynara quickly grew homesick and returned to Zinari. Upon learning of her departure, Zeus became furious and turned her into a purple-flowering thistle, beautiful to admire but prickly to touch.

Turn off the heat and let the artichokes cool to room temperature. Transfer to a large bowl and cover with plastic wrap. The artichokes will keep for up to 2 weeks in the refrigerator. Or, while the artichokes are still hot, transfer them along with the herbs, spices, and onions to four sterilized 16-ounce jars (see page 19). Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Onions

SADLY, I CANNOT AFFORD TO USE *aceto balsamico tradizionale di Modena* at my table. I break out the syrupy, caramelly good stuff, which can run hundreds of dollars for a small bottle, only on holidays and for special dinners. Real balsamic vinegar is aged for a minimum of 12 years in wooden casks and, as it ages, is siphoned into smaller and smaller barrels. In that final barrel, there may be some of the original vinegar mother — perhaps hundreds of years old.

Instead of going bankrupt buying balsamic vinegar, I anoint my family's plates with sweet-and-sour pearl onions. I put up the onions in the spring and keep them in the larder to use whenever a dish calls for some brightening. They add a bright note to grilled vegetables or a platter of roasted meat. No, these preserves don't have the complexity of a balsamic from Modena, but their flavor is a handsome substitute for savvy, frugal cooks.

Sweet-and-Sour Pearl Onions

MAKES 2 QUARTS (TWO 32-OUNCE JARS)

The alkaline nature of Dutch-processed cocoa tames the harshness of the vinegar and acts as a thickener for the sauce. Chocolate and onions may not seem like a natural pairing, but let me assure you, you won't question it once you try this recipe.

Prepare a large ice-water bath and set it on a counter. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add

- **2 pounds pearl onions**

and after 10 seconds, drain them in a colander. Transfer the onions to the ice water. One at a time, take out an onion and pinch the root end to pop the onion from its skin. Return the onions to the cold water to rinse, then drain and turn them out into a large bowl. Mix together

1 cup sugar

1 tablespoon kosher salt

Rub the onions with the sugar-salt mixture and set aside.

In a 4-quart or larger nonreactive pot, bring to a boil

3 cups balsamic vinegar

3 cups red wine

1 tablespoon Dutch-processed cocoa powder

8 black peppercorns

4 allspice berries

1 fresh bay leaf, cut in half

Cook until the mixture is reduced by one-fourth, about 5 minutes (take care not to breathe in the vinegary fumes). Add the onions and

¼ cup golden raisins

Return to a boil, stirring often to make sure the sugar doesn't scorch on the bottom of the pan. Boil until the onions are soft, about 5 minutes. With a slotted spoon and a widemouthed funnel, divide the onions and raisins equally between two sterilized 32-ounce widemouthed glass jars (see page 19). Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Garlic

AS SOON AS I FINISH PUTTING UP THE LAST of my wild ramps in the spring, my next-favorite allium (or part of it) appears in the fields and the markets: garlic scapes. These pretty, curlicue-looking stalks shoot up about a month after the first leaves appear on any of the many hard-neck varieties of the garlic plant. The strong, firm stalk carries the flower and seed-packet sheath, a promise of what's to come next year.

In order for the plant to grow plump bulbs, the garlic's energy must be directed downward into the soil. When a farmer severs the shoots, the plant hunkers down in the soil and produces larger, sweeter bulbs.

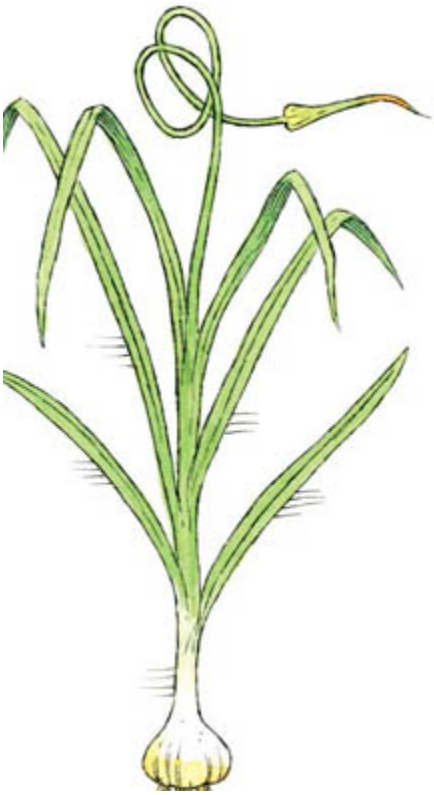
GARLIC SCAPE SALT

If a scape is too mature and woody by the end of season, you may be able to cut only one tender length from the plant. The rest of the stalk will have to be discarded to the compost heap, or if you're industrious and frugal (as I am), turn them into garlic salt: put the cut-up stalks in a spice grinder or food processor with ample amounts of coarse salt and pulse. Spread the salt in a rimmed baking sheet to dry for a few days. This green garlic salt puts to shame the store-bought, granulated stuff.

That's why, come late spring, you see the scapes in farmers' markets. Pruning and cutting is hard work, so in the interest of saving human energy and time, farmers came up with a way to hybridize the plants into a varietal known as soft-neck garlic, which does not throw off these scapes. Unfortunately, almost all garlic grown these days is this modern kind, and in the name of progress, the garlic scape and its culinary uses have fallen by the wayside. But not for me.

I enjoy preparing the scapes in a number of ways, but my favorite involves throwing them dry onto a hot wood fire to let them blister and char slightly before I put them in a bowl. There I toss them with a little salt, olive oil, lemon juice, and maybe a touch of clover honey. I let them hot-marinate like this for a moment before strewing them over other grilled vegetables, or possibly a steak or a roast. They're also great sliced thin and added to a quick stir-fry, though cutting away their distinctive shape comes with a twinge of sadness.

In midspring, when the scapes are being cut down by the bushel, I make these pickles so I can enjoy throughout the year the gifts the old-fashioned, hard-neck garlic has to offer.



By the Light of the Moon

Some farmers rely on the phases of the moon to direct their planting. Root vegetables, for example, are often planted by the light of the full moon, when their energy can be dragged into the soil; stalk crops are planted as the moon recedes, to help pull the plants upward to the sky.

Pickled Garlic Scapes

MAKES 2 QUARTS (FOUR 12-OUNCE JARS)

Use the natural, curly shape of the shoots to maximize what you can fit in the jars. If you cut off the curlicue about ½ inch below the beginning of the curve, cut the rest of the straight stalk into sticks 3 inches long and they'll stand up nicely in the jars.

On a cutting board, trim the S- or Q-shaped tops off

2 pounds garlic scapes

and set aside. Trim off the tough, woody bottoms and discard. Cut the remaining stalks into 3-inch lengths.

Into four sterilized, widemouthed 12-ounce jars (see page 19), put

12 coriander seeds (3 seeds per jar)

2 teaspoons dill seeds (teaspoon per jar)

1 teaspoon cumin seeds (teaspoon per jar)

Put the reserved curly tops in each jar sideways, as if they were rings. Fill the centers with the straight stalks and set aside.

In a 4-quart or larger nonreactive pot, bring to a boil

2½ cups apple cider vinegar

2½ cups water

¼ cup kosher salt

Stir often until the salt is dissolved. Pour the hot liquid into each jar, leaving ½ inch headspace. Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Pork Belly

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED BACON. For me, bacon is at its best in the morning, fried and served alongside fluffy buttermilk pancakes, with maple syrup ladled over both. Something about the salty with the sweet does it for me. While I always considered myself a bacon lover, I don't think I ever truly understood bacon until I visited Eastern Europe with my wife. In the old country, bacon is eaten cold. A hearty slab is laid upon a plate, always with a wide fat streak to ensure everyone stays warm in the winter. Eating bacon cold, as you would, say, salami or another deli meat, changes its taste. It's akin to comparing hot buttered corn on the cob with popcorn. Both delicious, both unique. You can appreciate nuances of pork belly that no

longer exist once you hard-fry. I love smoke and sweet, but there's much to be said for the taste of the fat and the tenderness of the meat, and how the two come together in your mouth.

To enjoy uncooked cured bacon, I suggest making it yourself. Curing bacon is easy to do and a lot less expensive than buying from a butcher. And better than that, you can cut slices as thick or as thin as you like (for me, thick rashers are the only way to go).

I like to add a thick slab to a daube of braised beef or coq au vin — it's what gives these French casseroles their unctuousness and hearty flavor. You'd be surprised how transformative even a small slab is to a pot of beans. Home-cured bacon is a crowd pleaser, not just in flavor, but also in the knowledge that it was prepared by the cook.

There are humbler ways to use home-cured bacon: serve it uncooked with fried eggs, hash browns, and toast, or fry it up into small lardoons to scatter over a green salad. Even if you don't have a smoker, this recipe makes an outstanding cured pork belly.

Smoked and Naturally Nitrate-Free Bacon

MAKES 3 POUNDS

Most commercial bacon contains saltpeter or nitrates to help preserve the meat as well as to give it the characteristic pink color. For the home cook, and for those trying to watch their nitrate intake, celery salt is a fine substitute, as it contains naturally occurring nitrates in a safe and controllable amount.

In a large bowl, combine

3 cups light brown sugar

3 cups kosher salt

½ cup celery salt

½ cup black peppercorns, cracked

¼ cup finely chopped fresh rosemary

2 tablespoons whole allspice berries, cracked

2 tablespoons whole cloves, cracked

6 cloves garlic, finely minced

Spread the spices all over a

1 (3-pound) skin-on slab pork belly

Thoroughly wrap the belly in four or five sheets of plastic wrap (or in a 1-gallon resealable plastic bag); put into a roasting pan or on a large, rimless plate; and refrigerate for 8 days. Turn over the package every other day.

DAY 9

Remove the pork belly from the plastic wrap and rinse under cold water. Pat dry, then put it on a rack on top of a rimmed baking sheet (or in a roasting pan) and refrigerate for 1 day, so it can dry slightly.

Heat a smoker to 180°F with your choice of wood (I like a mixture of ash and fruitwood). Put the pork belly, in another rimmed sheet pan, in the smoker until its internal temperature reaches 155°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 3 hours. Remove the bacon from the smoker and eat while warm, or chill in the refrigerator and then enclose in plastic wrap before slicing and frying. It keeps fresh up to 2 months.

Variation: If you don't have a smoker, you can oven-smoke the bacon. Fill the bottom of a sheet pan with water-soaked wood chips, set the bacon on top of the chips, and put the pan on the lowest rack. Turn the oven to 225°F. It will take about 2 hours for the bacon's internal temperature to reach 155°F.

A Pig's Head

EVERY SWINE-EATING SOCIETY has its own version of hog'shead cheese, whether it's called headcheese or brawn, *testa* or *lachenka*. It's not a cheese as we think of the word, however; it's actually a type of sausage. When you understand that the origin of the word *cheese* is the same as that for the word *case* (as in casing), you can see the connection.

Headcheese falls into two categories. Either it's a gelatinous sausage made by boning out the pig's head and rolling it up on itself into a dense meat cylinder lightly bound by gelatin or it's a sausage made by suspending flecks of meat, cartilage, and other tasty bits in a gelatin-filled mold that, after setting up and slicing, looks like edible stained glass. The latter version is the one I prefer: to my taste, it has just the right balance of gelatin and meat.

There is a surprising amount of meat in a pig's head, and it is only through a long, slow boil that you can extract it all. What's interesting about headcheese is the variety of components suspended within: crunchy ear cartilage, soft meat from the snout, and chewy meat from the cheeks and jowls. The only parts of the head that don't end up in the sausage are the brains (and that's fine by me) and the eyes (also fine with me).

Headcheese calls for strong aromatics and acid to balance the richness (and funk) of the meat. I find brining the pig's head before boiling it helps tame its intense porkiness.

Bits, Jumbles, and Jelly

MAKES TWO 1½-QUART TERRINES

Whether brining a pig's head, pork chops, or pork loin, this is the brine I use to infuse it with flavor and moistness. Ask your butcher to remove the brain if you don't plan on eating it. (Some folks flour pig brain, sear it in butter, and serve it with parsley and fried eggs.) What makes this terrine special is the layers of tastes and textures you get in each slice.

In a 16-quart stockpot over high heat, bring to a boil

2 gallons water

4 cups red wine vinegar

½ cup kosher salt

⅓ cup sugar

2 tablespoons curing salt #1 (see page 112)

1 carrot

1 celery stalk

½ medium yellow onion

2 fresh bay leaves

2 sprigs flat-leaf parsley

2 sprigs thyme

10 allspice berries

10 juniper berries

1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns

Boil, stirring occasionally, until the salt and sugar are dissolved. Turn off the heat and set aside to cool at room temperature. When it's cool, submerge in it

1 pig head, split, brain removed, rinsed under cold water

Cover the pot (weight down the pig head by setting a heavy plate on top of it) and refrigerate for 24 hours.

DAY 2

In the center of a 14-inch square of cheesecloth, put

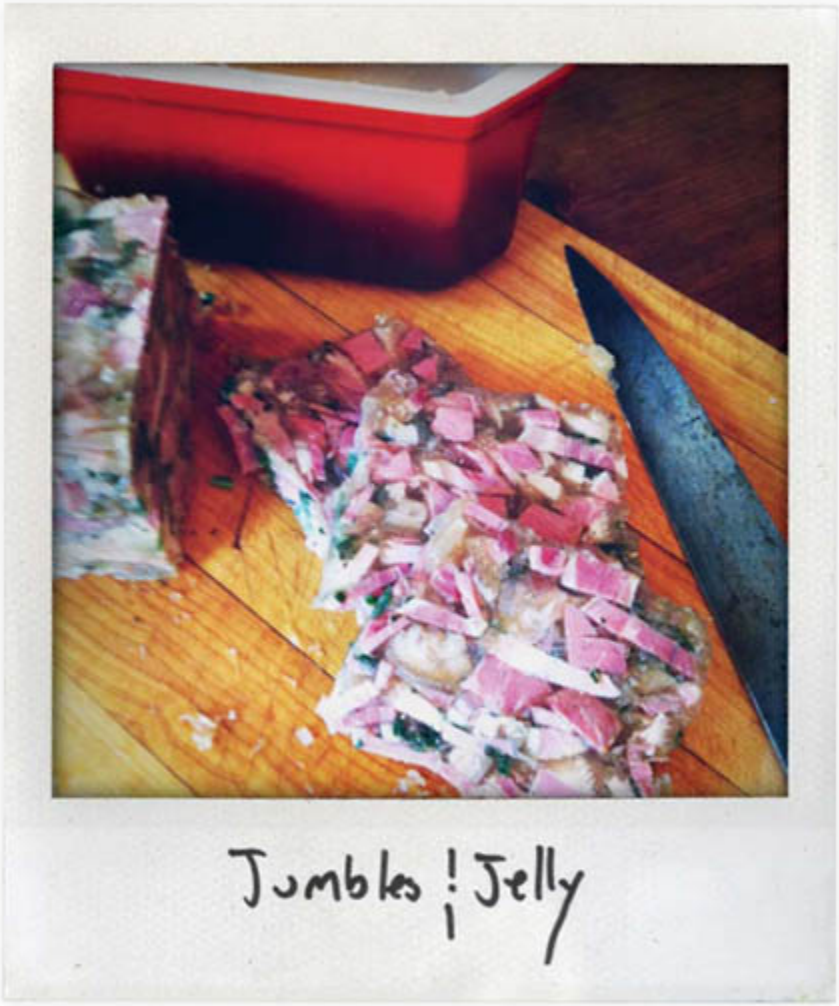
1 bunch flat-leaf parsley

4 sprigs fresh thyme

3 fresh bay leaves

¼ cup whole black peppercorns

Gather the corners and, with twine, tie the bundle into a tight spice sachet, then set aside.



Remove the pot from the refrigerator, take out the pig head, and transfer it to another large pot of fresh water (discard the brine). Bring the water to a boil and skim off any foam that rises to the surface. Add

4 celery stalks, coarsely chopped

2 carrots, coarsely chopped

2 leeks, white and light green parts only, coarsely chopped

2 yellow onions, coarsely chopped

1 head garlic, halved horizontally to expose cloves

Once the mixture returns to a boil, add the spice sachet along with

2 cups dry white wine

½ cup champagne vinegar

Simmer until the meat easily pulls away from the bone, 2 to 4 hours. With tongs and a wooden spoon, remove the head from the pot and set it on a rimmed baking sheet to cool; reserve the liquid. Once the head is cool enough to handle (it's easiest to handle at room temperature), carefully pick through it and remove all the meat from the cheeks, the snout, the tongue, and the ears. Slice the fat-striated cheeks into crescent-shaped strips; cube the tongue meat; pick through the snout meat and remove excess fat; and peel and discard the skin from the ears and slice the cartilage into thin strips. Put all the meat pieces in a large bowl and season with

generous pinch of fine sea salt

splash of champagne vinegar

½ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

6 shallots, finely chopped

3 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves

Strain the reserved cooking liquid into a 16-quart pot and add

7 gelatin sheets (see Note)

Simmer the mixture over medium-low heat until it is reduced to 12 cups, about 1 hour. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool slightly. Pour the still-warm gelatin mixture (the jelly) over the meat (the bits and jumble). Line two 1½-quart terrine pans or two 9- by 5-inch loaf pans with plastic wrap. With a big spoon, transfer the jelly and meat mixture to the terrine pans. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

When ready to serve, use the plastic wrap as a sling to remove the terrine from the mold and then slice it into very thin pieces. Arrange on a plate and let come to room temperature. This is delicious with raw onion rings and some vinegar, or accompanied by a lightly dressed salad of bitter greens,

such as arugula, chicory, or escarole. It’ll keep for 10 to 14 days in the refrigerator.

NOTE: In restaurants, sheet gelatin prevails over granulated gelatin, as it is easier to use and has a stronger bonding power. If you can’t find sheet (leaf) gelatin, substitute 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon of granulated gelatin. Bloom the gelatin (soften in water), following the instructions on the package before adding it to the strained cooking liquid.

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4 FOREST & WOODS: FORAGED, PICKED, AND PLUCKED

THE MYSTERY AND GLORY OF FORESTS AND WOODS are best experienced firsthand. Though a solitary walk through a dense collection of pines, oaks, and fragrant bushes is rewarding in itself, for me, a forager's bounty is the real prize. From fallen black walnuts and pecans to wild angelica, from the

hushed presence of deer to the occasional flushing of a pheasant, quiet excitement abounds.

Some think the rise of cathedrals and temples of long-ago Europe coincided with the felling of the expansive and dense virgin forests that once covered more than 40 percent of the land. The soaring and naturally majestic architecture of branches and tree trunks inspired medieval buttresses, elaborate archways, and glittering panes of stained glass. As I roam the forest in search of whatever edibles I can identify, I can't help but agree.

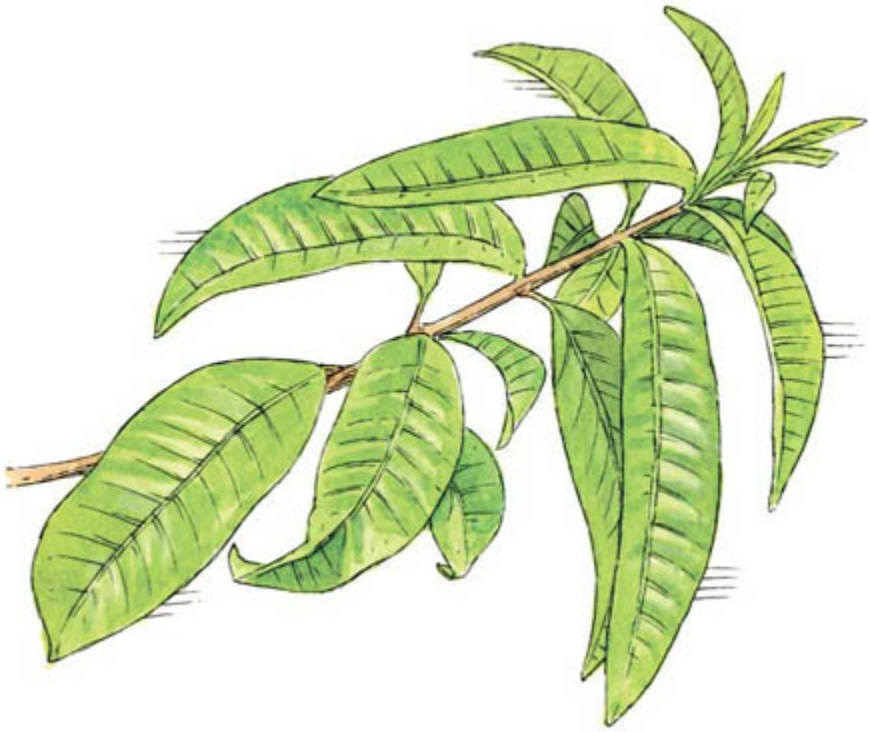
Sunlight razors through clusters of leaves and falls on branches hanging heavy with elderberries, while just across the path damp shade prevails, providing perfect conditions for mushroom parasols and camouflage for wildlife. The central truth of the woods is that they're ever changing. One afternoon hike results in a mere handful of shriveled sloe plums and another leads to bountiful fairy rings of mushrooms. It's the unpredictability of the gifts from the woods that I find most compelling.

Wild Strawberries

WHEN HIKING THROUGH THE WOODS in early June and I happen upon wild strawberries, I'm overwhelmed by elation and disbelief, chased down by excitement and anticipation. Usually these berries don't make it into a dish; I gobble them down as fast as I can gather them. If I collect enough — and have the willpower not to gorge — I cook them into a preserve. With some sugar and a quick simmer, they wilt into a beautifully textured, garnet-colored jam. To offset its intensely sweet flavor, I incorporate the lemon-piney essence of spiky lemon verbena leaves. It's a match particularly well suited to pairing with scones and clabber cream (see page 98), waffles, or to finishing a sauce for wild game, such as quail or pheasant.

Strawberries are creepers, meaning they grow low to the ground, wending their way beneath trees, shrubs, and the edges of paths. Though the small berries are no bigger than a dress shirt's button, they pack a punch at once intense, sweet, and jammy. Wild strawberries seem barely related to the massive, bland-tasting supermarket specimens packed in plastic and available year-round.

For such a delicious treat, isn’t it sad that their season is short-lived? When I can’t find wild strawberries on my hikes, I head to the Greenmarket and buy Tri-Star strawberries, a hybrid of wild woodland strawberries and a Canyon varietal. They’re sweet and luscious and, as a bonus, bear through three seasons — a very nice alternative to forest-foraged berries.



Strawberry and Lemon Verbena Preserves

MAKES 1¼ QUARTS (FIVE 8-OUNCE JARS)

Sweet and simple, this is an excellent preserve for anyone who has never made jam or doesn’t have a lot of time to make it. You’ll be delighted by the depth of flavor you get from such a brief investment of time. If you can’t find lemon verbena itself, steep two lemon verbena tea bags in the boiling water instead of fresh herbs. Or replace the fresh lemon verbena with lemon balm, lemon basil, or even lemongrass.

Put a small ceramic plate in the freezer. In a medium saucepan, bring to a boil

1 cup water

¼ cup loosely packed fresh lemon verbena leaves

Reduce the heat to low and add

2 pounds strawberries (leave tiny ones whole; halve others)

5 cups sugar

Stir periodically to prevent the sugar from scorching on the bottom of the pan. Once the sugar is dissolved (about 3 minutes), turn the heat to high and bring the liquid back to a boil. Continue to cook until the mixture turns a light amber and has the viscosity of honey (15 minutes), skimming the foam from the top as necessary. Turn off the heat.

Remove the plate from the freezer and drop a tablespoon of the hot mixture onto it. Tilt the plate. The mixture should hold its shape without running. If it doesn't, continue to cook for a few minutes longer.

Portion the preserves into five sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19) and refrigerate for up to 3 weeks, or follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

"Are wild strawberries really wild? Will they scratch an adult, will they snap at a child?"

— SHEL SILVERSTEIN, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*

Maple Syrup

IN NORTH AMERICA, the tradition of tapping maple trees for maple syrup goes back thousands of years. Many Eastern Woodland Indians have their accounts of maple's discovery, often crediting the Creator, Earth Mother, or another god. The story I like best is an Iroquois tale about the wife of a chief who let her pot of meat run dry. Rather than walk all the way to a river to get water to replenish it, she used watery sap found beneath the limb of a wounded tree. She placed the pot under the limb, collected the sap, and got

on with cooking. The sweet result made a lasting impression and thus, according to this Iroquois tale, led to the discovery of maple syrup.

No matter who came up with the idea, it was certainly the Native Americans who first tapped trees for sap, collecting the barely sweet liquid in a bucket made of birch bark. Because the birch ignited if set directly over a fire, instead big stones were heated and then put in the bucket to boil the sap. The stones were continuously removed, reheated, and put back in with the sap until the moisture evaporated, creating maple sugar.

When colonists arrived in the late 1600s and into the 1700s, the native peoples taught them how to collect maple sap and make sugar. The sugar was more valued, as there was no way to keep the syrup from spoiling. Maple sugar had the added appeal of being half the price of cane sugar, making it a thrifty choice among the settlers.

Native Americans were accustomed to slashing trees quite deep (the trees would usually succumb after a few seasons), but the colonists devised a way to tap the trees with a small hole and using a wood tube made from the branch of a cedar, elderberry, or sumac tree. This new way of coaxing out the sap didn’t harm the trees, and by the next season, the holes had healed and new tap were inserted elsewhere.

Until the 1860s, almost all maple sap was turned into maple sugar. During and after the Civil War, it was purchased by many abolitionists instead of cane sugar as an economic protest against slavery. Once the tin can was invented, the popularity of maple syrup soared, for then it could be preserved for a long span of time. Even though maple-syrup production has advanced since the period of the Pilgrims and the Native Americans, it still takes about 40 gallons of sap to yield 1 gallon of syrup, making maple syrup one of the most labor-intense seasonal treats around.

One of the many reasons I love this compote is that it bends the rules of what can be considered “seasonal.” Some might say that cooking seasonally requires using fresh produce at its peak of ripeness, and preferably grown at farms within just a few-hundred-mile radius. But I like to think that with a well-stocked larder, you can cook with reverence for each season and still add limitless interest and variety.

Maple syrup is tapped toward the end of winter, when the daytime temperatures aren't quite as frigid but the nighttime thermometer still reads below freezing. This is when sweet sap begins to flow. In the same region, different season, blueberries reach their peak between 6 and 8 months after the end of the maple harvest. In this one magical spoon fruit, you bring together two seasonal treats and put them up for year-round enjoyment.

Blueberry-Maple Spoon Fruit

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

Isn't it incredible that the heat of the sun is all that's necessary to "cook" this loose-textured jam? With this method, it retains a fresh sweet and tart quality that a cooked preserve could never come close to. It's the sun tea of jams. As it is uncooked, it's crucial to rub the insides of the jars with vodka. This will sterilize them and prevent any bacteria from finding their way into the preserves to spoil your efforts. This recipe pleads to be made in the summertime, when blueberries are at their peak.

Rub the insides of four sterilized 8-ounce jars (see page 19) with a clean kitchen towel dipped in

2 tablespoons vodka

Measure out

1 pound maple sugar

and spoon 2 tablespoons of it into each jar. Starting with

2 quarts blueberries

add 1 inch of the berries to each jar. Repeat layers of maple sugar and blueberries until the last layer of berries reaches almost to the top of the jar. Peel

4 (½-inch-wide) strips of lemon rind

and tuck one into the top layer of berries in each jar.

Divide any remaining maple sugar among the jars and tamp down by lightly tapping each jar on the counter to settle the contents. Tightly screw on the lids and shake to further disperse the sugar. Set the jars upside down on a windowsill or on a porch or balcony that gets sun for most of the day.

After 1 day, you'll notice that the sugar has begun to melt and the berries are "cooking" in the sun's heat. Flip over each jar, right-side up, and leave for another day. Repeat this flipping every day for the next 9 days. After this time, all of the sugar should have melted and the berries will have given off a good amount of their liquid. Feel the top of lid — it should be stiff, not give to pressure: the dynamics in play as the jars sit in the sun are enough to seal the lids — no further processing is necessary. The jars are now ready to be stored in a cool, dark, and dry area.

NOTE: This recipe calls for maple sugar, which is made by cooking robust Grade B maple syrup until no water is left: all that remains are rocks of maple sugar that then get pulverized into a granulated state. Maple sugar is quite a bit sweeter than granulated sugar, so if you plan to use it in other recipes, use $^{2}/_{3}$ cup for every 1 cup of granulated sugar.

Angelica

BEFORE BERRIES AND OTHER SUMMER FRUITS were available 365 days a year, we were a lot more resourceful about our sweets. Old-world cooks had many ways to preserve the summer harvest. Many of these recipes were first perfected by monks in their apothecaries. Life in a monastery left plenty of time to watch the flowers grow.

One example of herbal preservation in its most delicious form is candied angelica root. Angelica root has been prized for centuries as a tonic and restorative for all kinds of digestive and respiratory ailments. It grows happily in the cold wilds of northern countries and, over the centuries, has found its way into many traditional cakes and other confections. One dish that everyone has an opinion about (whether you love it or laugh at it) is

fruitcake. Once upon a time, those green-dyed bits of maraschino cherries were actually emerald green nuggets of candied angelica stem. Unfortunately, because angelica is rarely cultivated today, most of us never get to see a real fruitcake, with its angelica-studded mosaic, and must settle for the anemic and chemical taste of dyed cherries. Even though angelica candy is difficult to find, you might know its deeply mineral, herbaceous, and pine taste because it's a key flavor ingredient in many liqueurs, such as absinthe, Chartreuse, and some kinds of gin.

Angelica grows to be quite large. By late spring, one 3-foot tall plant provides enough stalks to fulfill your candied angelica needs for a year. Although the entire plant is edible, I candy only the hollow, reed-like stalks. The leaves, seedpods, and plant trimmings go straight into a bottle of grappa or vodka. After a couple of months, you have an inexpensive but delicious digestif that's lovely over ice and served with roasted almonds or tasty olives.

Candied Angelica Stems

MAKES 1½ QUARTS (FOUR 12-OUNCE JARS)

If you have ever candied any kind of fruit or herb (ginger, for example), you know the drill. But I tell you, it's always magic.

Use the tip of a paring knife to peel away the tough and thick strings from

- **2 (2½-foot) angelica stalks**

Slice them into 2-inch-long batons and then put them in a large stock-pot of boiling water. Cook until the stalks are tender and a paring knife easily slips into the flesh, 3 to 5 minutes. Turn off the heat and stir in

- **2 tablespoons kosher salt**

Once the stalks turn to a vibrant green, drain the angelica and put the stems on a scale lined with plastic wrap. Weigh the angelica, then transfer it to a

large heatproof bowl. Now, whatever the angelica weighs, put into a medium saucepan that amount of

sugar

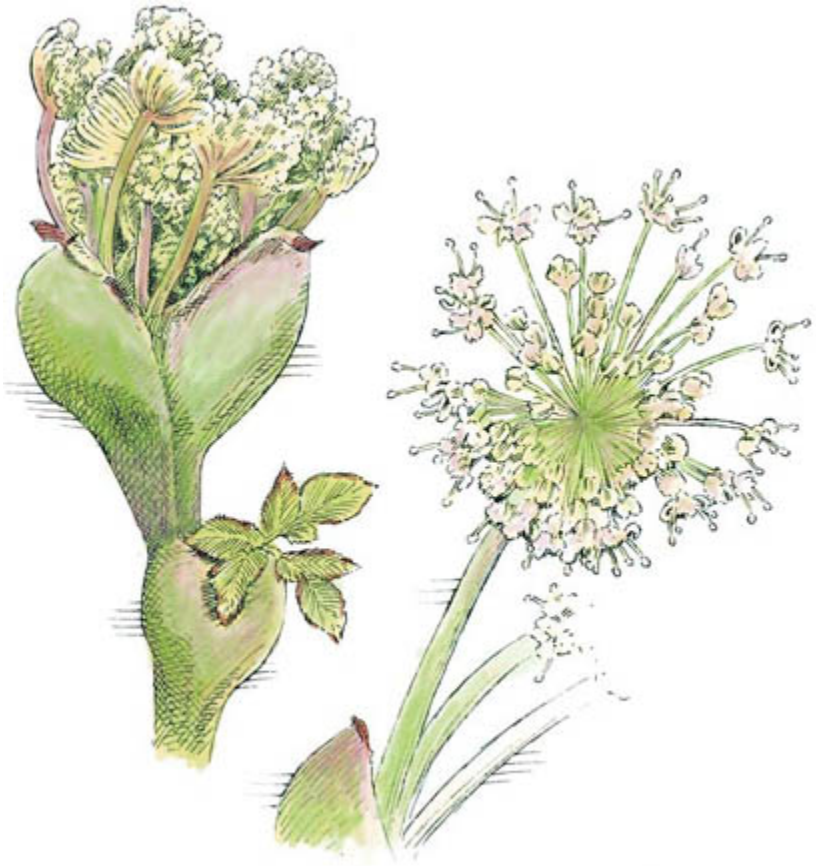
Add water weighing half that amount (in fluid ounces). For example, if you have 1 pound of angelica, you'll add 1 pound (2¼ cups) of sugar and 8 fluid ounces (1 cup) of water. Bring the water and sugar to a boil, stirring occasionally until the sugar is dissolved. Pour the boiling syrup over the angelica, making sure the angelica is completely submerged. If it isn't, transfer all to a smaller container with less volume or weight it down with a small plate. Cover with a sheet of plastic wrap and leave it on the counter overnight.

DAY 2

Set a sieve over a clean, medium saucepan and strain the angelica so that the liquid goes into the pan. Reserve the angelica stems in their bowl and bring the syrup to a boil. Pour the boiling syrup over the angelica and let sit overnight. Repeat this process every day for 4 or 5 days, until the syrup is reduced to a sticky consistency. At that point, the angelica is fully candied.

DAY 6 OR 7

Put the candied angelica in a sterilized glass container (see page 19) and seal. Store on a cool, dark, dry shelf; it will keep for up to 1 year. Or put the angelica stems on a sheet of waxed paper and let them sit for 24 hours to crystallize. Once they've crystallized, store the candied stems in an airtight glass container on a cool, dark, dry shelf until the holidays beckon and you find yourself wanting to make a traditional fruitcake.

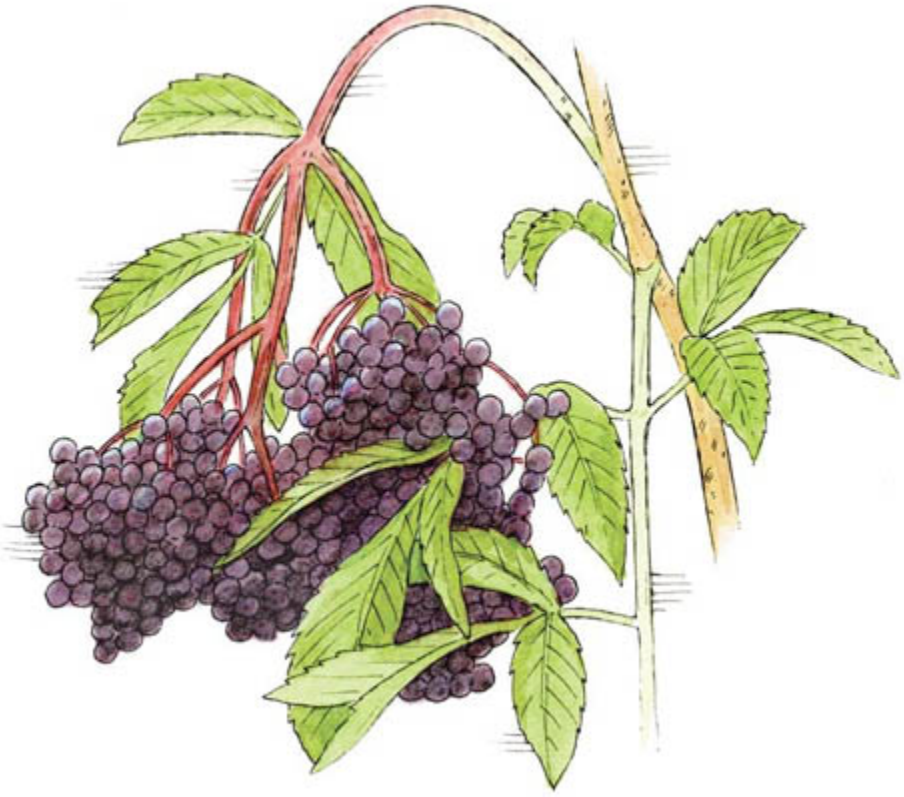


Elderberries

FORAGING IN THE WOODS IS OFTEN A SOLITARY pastime, one I appreciate for the meditation it affords me. But when I'm in search of elderberry flowers and fruits, it's an activity best enjoyed with my family and friends. Little children come in especially handy as you lift them onto your shoulders to help pull down branches, and again when their agile and quick little fingers efficiently pick the berries.

In the spring, the trees themselves are easy to spot, often next to a creek or a gurgling stream, heavy with tiny white umbels that burst forth from the green. The dilemma (once I find the trees, that is) is deciding how many of the blossoms to pick. I have to collect enough to fry up immediately for fritters, a lacy treat that gets showered in powdered sugar and is a delicious reward for a day of reaching and plucking. But I would be foolish not to leave some blossoms to bear fruit in the fall so I can make elderberry

compote and ketchup. Fortunately, elder trees are generous, and I never have to sacrifice one temptation to ensure the other.



Elderberry Compote

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

To harvest, use a sharp pair of shears to snip off a berry cluster where the branch is light green. Collect the clusters in a basket or bag, and when you get home, separate the berries from the branches and the stems from the berries. Nimble fingers and some good, strong summer tonic will help speed the task. This compote is lovely as is, or spoon it over a scoop of vanilla ice cream, fresh ricotta, or lightly sweetened whipped cream.

In a glass or ceramic bowl, mix

2 pounds elderberries

3 (2-inch) strips lemon zest

¼ split vanilla bean

Cover with

3 cups (1½ pounds) sugar

Tightly cover the bowl with a sheet of plastic wrap and set aside at room temperature to cure overnight.

Respect Your Elders

There's some mystery surrounding the elder tree. Some believe that Saint Patrick used a branch of it to drive serpents from Ireland. The Gospel of Matthew hypothesizes that after turning over Jesus to the Romans, guilt-ridden Judas hanged himself from the limb of an elder. The crucifix itself is said to have been made from elder wood. In Scandinavia, some Slavic countries, and the United Kingdom, planting an elder close to a home was thought to bring good fortune by warding off witches and other evil spirits; burning elder wood would bring bad luck and even the devil. To avoid ill effects, woodsmen would ask the Elder Mother for permission before cutting a branch or felling an entire tree: "Old woman, give me some of thy wood and I will give thee some of mine when I grow into a tree."

DAY 2

Transfer the mixture (it should look juicy and somewhat granular) to a large pot and add

1 cup lemon juice (from 5 or 6 lemons)

Bring to a boil over high heat. As soon as you see the first few bubbles, turn off the heat and remove the pan. Sterilize four 8-ounce jars (see page 19). Divide the compote among the still-warm jars and follow the instructions for canning on page 21, processing the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Wild Chanterelles

FEW THINGS ARE MORE MAGICAL than walking through the woods and seeing, unexpectedly, wave upon wave of otherworldly mushrooms. On many occasions I've found myself surrounded by fungi only to be without my mycology book — the frustration! I remember something a friend's grandmother, an avid mushroom forager, said: If you cut them small enough and cook them long enough, 95 percent of all mushrooms are edible. Though I desperately want to pick the wild 'shrooms (seared in butter, sprinkled with herbs and salt; does it get any better?), I listen to my better instincts (also known as my wife) and let them be.

By now I know several varieties by sight, and discovering them is like spotting a long-lost friend in a thicket of strangers. Frilly chanterelles and chunky-stemmed porcinis are my favorites direct from the forest, and I often make pickled mushrooms with them. Let it be known, though, that I'll happily make this pickle with button mushrooms if my luck runs dry.

Pickled Chanterelle Mushrooms

MAKES 2 QUARTS (FOUR 16-OUNCE JARS)

Pickled mushrooms are a staple of the Eastern and Middle European larder, and are often served with a good roast or simply with bread and butter. To extract all the flavors and aromas from the spices and herbs, I make a hot salt marinade and bury the mushrooms beneath it before pickling. The aromas of the herbs and spices permeate the salt, and the heat from the salt makes the mushrooms more receptive to absorbing these heady scents. Although this recipe is for chanterelles, it will work just as well with porcini, cremini, white buttons, and other foraged wild mushrooms.

In a large bowl, put

2 pounds chanterelle mushrooms, brushed free of dirt and debris
8 shallots, finely diced
2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves
1 tablespoon coarsely chopped marjoram leaves
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs fresh rosemary

Put in a skillet

12 black peppercorns
6 allspice berries
1 whole clove
1 tablespoon fennel seeds

Toast the spices over medium-high heat until fragrant and the fennel seeds take on a bit of color, about 2 minutes. Add

¼ cup kosher salt

Stir in the salt and continue to cook until the salt is warmed through, another 1 minute.

Pour the salt and spices over the mushrooms and herbs and set aside while you make the pickling liquid.

In a medium saucepan, boil

2 cups water
1 cup fruity olive oil
½ cup aged sherry vinegar
¼ cup dried currants
8 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons sugar

Pour over the mushrooms, tightly cover the bowl with plastic wrap, and set aside until the bottom of the bowl is cool to the touch and the liquid is at room temperature, 1 to 2 hours.

Sterilize the jars (see page 19) and divide the mushrooms among the still-warm jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Woodland Mushrooms, Nuts, and Berries

PAIRING MUSHROOMS WITH FRUIT and sometimes nuts is traditional in Italy, where the combination is known as *frutti di bosco*, "fruits of the forest." When I first heard about *frutti di bosco*, I was taken aback — a sweet-savory compote made of mushrooms, herbs, and berries? How odd . . . and how intriguing! The concept has an Italian aesthetic: you embark on a hike, collect what you find, and then enjoy the fruits of your labors unadulterated in one dish.

That there is harmony in this collection of disparate ingredients makes sense when you take a walk through the woods and see wild berries and mushrooms growing alongside, or at least within the vicinity of, each other. Tiny strawberries found deep in the woods starting in late spring and lasting through summer are particularly tasty with acidic and apricot-flavored chanterelle mushrooms, which are found around the same time. But any

combination of forest fruit and edible fungus can work well; just pay attention to the inherent characteristics of each ingredient and choose herbs and spices that work as natural complements.

There are countless ways to prepare this compote, but I like to keep things simple, so the clean and bright flavors of the berries and the earthy flavored mushrooms aren't lost in a muddle: a good olive oil, a shallot, an herb or two (rosemary and thyme to highlight the mushrooms; basil and wild mint to accentuate the berries), and perhaps toasted nuts (I'm keen on pine nuts).

Frutti di Bosco Compote

MAKES 2 QUARTS (TWO 32-OUNCE JARS)

One taste of this compote and I'm transported to the pleasures of an afternoon spent hunched under a leafy canopy. It's delicious as is, with grilled fish, a pork roast, or a veal chop, lovely served as a sauce to dress fresh tagliatelle, and decadent as a last-minute accompaniment to risotto.

In a large pot of well-salted boiling water, blanch

1 pound fresh, cleaned wild mushrooms

When the mushrooms are just starting to wilt, after about 1½ minutes, drain them in a colander and divide them between two sterilized 1-quart jars (see page 19). Equally divide between the two jars (and in this order)

1 shallot, very finely minced

6 rosemary needles

2 fresh bay leaves

1 pound small wild blueberries

3 cups sugar

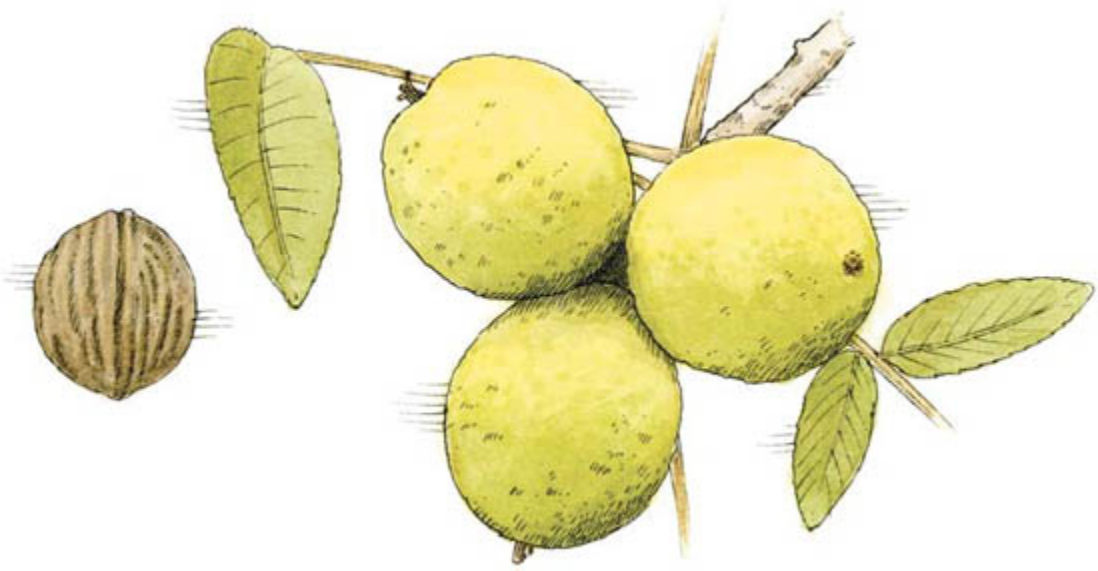
½ cup red wine vinegar

⅛ teaspoon kosher salt

The mixture should come to ½ inch of the lip of each jar. Screw on the lids and vigorously shake to combine. Set the jars on a sunny windowsill until a semithick syrup develops, 48 to 72 hours, turning the jars occasionally.

DAY 3 OR 4

Follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath.



Black Walnuts, Part I

WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING TO THE MEAT of a black walnut, an ordinary nutcracker is about as useful as a feather. You'll need blunt force to get through the rock-hard shell: use a sledgehammer or a heavy stone. Unlike with their cousin, the kinder and softer-shelled English walnut, you'll never come across a black walnut half in a grocery store, and when you find black walnut pieces in a market, their price tag will reflect the effort required to extract the meat from the shell.

But wait. Don't let its toughness dampen your resolve to get into a black walnut. Once you experience its piney, citrus flavor, you'll be glad you did. Foraging for black walnuts is how you'll get them for free (well, if you don't count your sweat and tears as hard labor . . .). Whereas the fuzzy green walnuts used for making *nocino* (see page 193) appear in late June, black walnuts with mature and meaty nuts usually drop in September.

When I was a boy in England, our neighbor had a black walnut tree that grew next to a tennis court. In early fall, the nuts would drop, leaving horrible black stains all over the cement. My friends and I used sticks, bricks, tennis rackets, and stones in our attempts to dislodge the jewels within. What we got was barely a crumb — but because of its powerful

flavor, that crumb was always received with as much pomp as small boys can muster.

Black Walnut Chutney

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

I adapted a marmalade recipe to make this chutney because I love how the fresh orange flavors interact with the piney essence of the black walnuts. The addition of molasses imparts a licorice flavor that enhances the combination and provides complexity that is unexpected but harmonious. It's my go-to condiment for lamb chops or a leg of lamb, robust enough to stand up to the lamb's strong flavor.

In a 4-quart or larger heavy-bottomed pot, bring to a boil

8 cups water
2 oranges, with rind, halved, seeded, and chopped into 1-inch pieces
1 (1-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled and finely diced
juice of 1 lemon

Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer gently until the fruit is soft and tender, about 30 minutes. Add to the pot

¼ cup apple cider vinegar
2 cups black walnut pieces
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
½ cup dark or blackstrap molasses
1 fennel bulb, halved, cored, and chopped into -inch pieces
¼ teaspoon ground allspice
pinch of kosher salt

Increase the heat to medium and cook until the liquid reduces and becomes syrupy, 20 to 30 minutes. Divide the chutney among four 8-ounce jars and

refrigerate for up to 1 month, or follow the instructions for canning on page 21 and process the jars for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bath.

Black Walnuts, Part II

A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM of wrestling with the rock-hard shells of black walnuts is to pick them young and green, when the shell is soft enough to use without removing it, as in *nocino,* a silky, treacly elixir. Made throughout Italy and in the south of Switzerland, nocino has been a Christmas tradition for centuries. Lore has it that in the Middle Ages,

monks collected the green walnuts on June 24, the night of Saint Giovanni. From them, they made a liqueur, cured in the sun and then aged for months before drinking as a digestif or using as a medicinal aid.

If you were to follow tradition, you would collect 24 walnuts on June 24 and cut each into quarters. You'd put them in a clear jar and cover with vodka (or grappa or Everclear), lemon zest, sugar, and spices (the spices would vary from family to family). The jar would be shaken once in a while over the course of a few months. By the time the holidays rolled around, you'd have a strong, somewhat bittersweet, espresso-colored liqueur perfect lightly chilled and sipped among friends.

Black Walnut Liqueur

MAKES ONE 750 ML BOTTLE

Tradition aside, you'd do well to pick more than 24 black walnuts on June 24 and make a few extra bottles to give as holiday gifts. This recipe easily doubles and quadruples — multiply each ingredient by the number of bottles you're making (to get six bottles, for example, you'll need 144 walnuts). For a very strong version, use Everclear alcohol, a pure-grain vodka-style tasteless alcohol that comes in two strengths: 190 proof (illegal in more than a dozen states) and 151 proof (legal in most states).

Into a 1-gallon, widemouthed mason jar, put

24 young black walnuts (they look like green golf balls), sliced into eighths

1 lemon rind, cut into ¼-inch-wide strips, pith removed

3 star-anise pods, cracked

1 cinnamon stick

1 pound sugar (about 2½ cups)

1 (750 ml) bottle vodka or 4 cups Everclear plus 2 cups water

Save the vodka bottle if you want to use it for your liqueur. Screw on the lid of the jar as tightly as you can and shake the jar vigorously 24 times. Store

the jar in a cool, dark, and dry place for 40 days. Every 10 days or so, give it a shake. You'll notice its color becoming increasingly mahogany tinted.

DAY 41

Strain the liqueur through a fine-mesh sieve into a large pitcher. Taste it (it should be strong and bitter) and then pour it into a 750 ml bottle, preferably one with a stopper (use the original vodka bottle if you have a stopper for it). Seal the bottle and put it back onto a shelf in a cool, dark, and dry spot for at least 3 months. The nocino should mellow in time to enjoy around the holidays.

Pecans

PECANS ARE NATIVE TO THE AMERICAS and grow throughout the Southeast and the southwestern states, as well as in Mexico. Early colonists perfected the cultivation of this nut, which was a treasured food of Native Americans. The sweet and buttery-tasting nuts of the pecan tree — a member of the hickory family — are a sign of fall in the South, where they're made into pies and pralines for holidays and other celebrations.

I like to play with their barky flavor by preserving them in a sweet nut brittle that will keep for months and months. This light brittle provides shards of quick energy, great for accompanying you and your family on hikes and rambles.

Pecan and Fennel Seed Brittle

MAKES 4 CUPS

There are some tricks to making a good nut brittle. Baking soda and butter help give it the characteristic snap; a warmed baking sheet enables you to roll the hot, liquid mixture thin before it hardens; and flexible silicone sheet-pan liners make getting the brittle out of the pan (and cleanup) a cinch. A touch of fennel seed gives this brittle an old-time licorice flavor that I find charming.

Line an 18- by 13-inch baking sheet with a silicone mat or a heavily greased 18- by 13-inch piece of parchment paper (generously coat with nonstick, unflavored pan spray) and put it in the oven. Then heat the oven to 200°F.

Knock knock. Who's there? Pecan. Pecan who? Pecan someone your own size!

Generously coat another silicone mat or piece of parchment paper with nonstick pan spray and set aside. In a 4-quart heavy-bottomed pot, whisk together

4 cups sugar

2 cups good-quality honey

2 cups water

Bring the mixture to a boil over medium heat, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer gently until the mixture is a deep amber and reaches 250°F on a candy thermometer. Stir in

2 cups pecan halves

2 tablespoons fennel seeds

1 teaspoon kosher salt

Cook until the pecans and fennel seeds are highly aromatic, about 2 minutes. The sugar mixture will continue to darken. Once the mixture reaches 290°F, turn off the heat and *quickly* (the mixture will foam up quite a bit) add

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 teaspoons baking soda

Take the warmed baking sheet from the oven and put it on your work surface. Give the brittle mixture a stir and then carefully pour it onto the baking sheet. Put the second greased silicone mat (or sheet of parchment paper), slick-side down, on top of the brittle. With a rolling pin, roll the mixture as thin as possible. Set aside until completely cool, 30 minutes to 1

hour. Use your fingers to break the brittle into big pieces and store in an airtight container or an apothecary jar for up to 6 months.

Venison Summer Sausage

WHEN I GO CAMPING OR CANOEING, I pack my satchel with nut brittle and summer sausage. Smooth-textured, slightly sweet, tangy, and smoky, summer sausage is a distinctly American wonder of charcuterie, masterminded to be able to withstand the hot summer months without refrigeration through a process of fermenting, curing, and finally smoking. Modern times and tastes (and regulations) have changed the process somewhat, and now the sausage is usually refrigerated or frozen to preserve its moistness.

Rich-flavored venison is my favorite kind of summer sausage to make, and although I'm not a hunter, I'm lucky enough to have a friend who is a good shot, and whom I can count on to supply me with a handsome delivery of meat every year once hunting season closes.

While hunting is, for the most part, a solitary sport, sausage making is definitely a social activity that always brings to mind the old adage "Many hands make light work." I recruit relatives and friends and we divvy up the meat, grind it, and help one another with making the links. Sharing the results is a proud moment of satisfaction and pride for all hands involved.

Spiced Venison and Cherry Summer Sausage

MAKES FOUR 18-INCH-LONG SAUSAGES

To accentuate the venison's rich flavor, I fold juniper berries and dried cherries into the filling along with cubes of pork fatback to bring extra moisture to the sausage as well as a nice mosaic effect. For the characteristic tang and to help ferment the meat, I often use a starter culture (see Resources, page 247) in place of the red wine vinegar. Substitute ¼ teaspoon of culture plus 2 tablespoons of water.

In a small saucepan, bring to a simmer

1 cup fruity red wine (such as a Barbaresco)

¼ cup red wine vinegar

¼ cup dried cherries

Stew the cherries over medium heat until they're plump, about 2 minutes. Turn off the heat, transfer them to a small container, and refrigerate until completely chilled.

In a coffee grinder, finely grind

2 tablespoons juniper berries

and set aside. Into a quart-size resealable plastic bag, put

3 tablespoons yellow mustard seeds

1 tablespoon coarsely cracked black peppercorns

Set the bag on top of a cutting board. Using a heavy-bottomed pot, a skillet, or a rolling pin, smash the spices to break them up into small bits. Transfer the spices along with 2 teaspoons of the ground juniper (save the rest for another use) to a medium bowl.

Add

½ cup dry milk powder

4 garlic cloves, finely minced

1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh marjoram

2 tablespoons sugar

1 tablespoon plus 1½ teaspoons kosher salt

2 teaspoons ground coriander

2 teaspoons ground ginger

1 teaspoon curing salt #1 (see page 112)

Whisk everything together and set aside. Using a meat grinder set to the smallest die, grind

3 pounds lean venison, from the leg, neck, or shoulder, cut into 1-inch cubes

1 pound semifrozen pork fatback, cut into 1-inch cubes

Put the meat in a large bowl and add the spice mixture. Wearing latex gloves, vigorously mash and mix the meat and spices until well combined and quite sticky. Fold in the plumped cherries (and any remaining cooking liquid) and

¼ pound semifrozen pork fatback, cut into $^{1}/_{16}$-inch cubes

Heat a small nugget of the mixture in a small nonstick skillet over medium-high until cooked through. Cool, taste, and adjust the big batch of sausage filling as necessary. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate while you set up the sausage-making equipment (the meat can be refrigerated up to 24 hours).

Into a medium bowl of cool water, mix

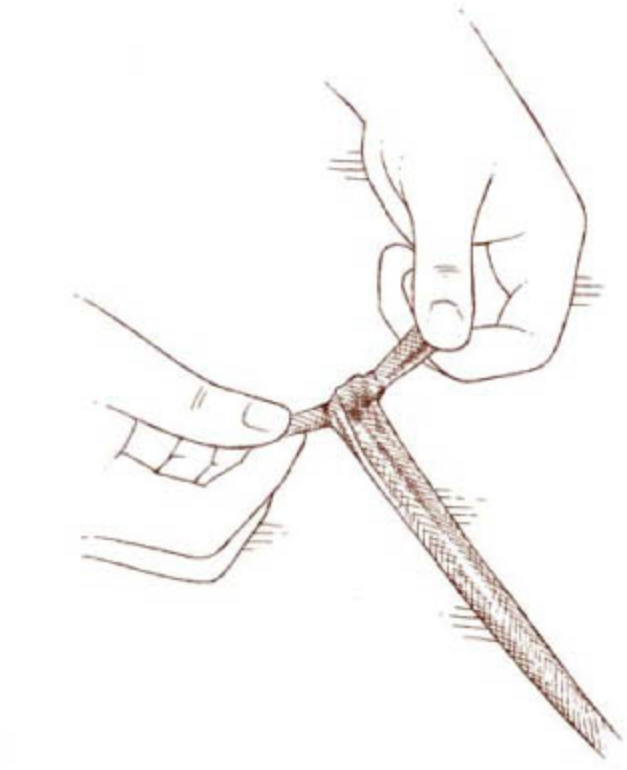
1½ teaspoons white vinegar

Add

8 feet natural beef middle casings or 65 mm collagen casings

Submerge the casings in the vinegar water for 5 minutes to soften the membranes, which will make them easier to handle. Remove the casings from the water and slice them into six 16-inch-long pieces. Slice through the bottom of each piece lengthwise, making a 2-inch slit in the middle of the casing. Tie the two ends together and make a knot in the bottom of each casing, and then put them back in the water until you’re ready to use them. (Water is your best friend when making sausage — it keeps the casings soft and elastic and makes it easy to slip them onto the stuffing funnel.)

Make a 2-inch slit in the casing.



Then tie the ends together in a box knot.

Load a casing onto the sausage stuffer and fill until there are just about 2 inches left on the other end (the sausage should be pretty full but not packed to the brim). Gather the casing at the opposite end and compact the filling by moving your hand from the untied end down until the sausage feels taut and snappy. Check the sausage for air pockets and pop with a needle any you see (don't worry about juices escaping — this is one of the wonders of sausage: the casing will reseal itself around the pinprick). Tie the end with an 8-inch piece of twine, twisting it around the end several times to tighten the sausage. Tie the two ends of twine together to make a loop for hanging the sausage in the smoker. Put the finished link on a baking sheet and refrigerate as you make the rest of the sausages. (Add each to the baking sheet as you go.) Let the sausages cure, refrigerated, overnight.

DAY 2

Hang the sausages in an unheated smoker for 1 hour, to allow the casings to dry out. Turn the smoker to 160°F and smoke the sausages with a heavy smudge (see page 23) until their internal temperature reaches 150°F, about 3 hours. Remove the sausages from the smoker and immediately transfer them to the refrigerator to chill completely, about 3 hours.

Once chilled, the sausages can be sliced and eaten, or enclosed in plastic wrap, waxed paper, or even better, deli paper and refrigerated for up to 6 weeks. To freeze, wrap in a double-layer of plastic wrap. Sausages will keep in the freezer for up to 6 months.

The sausage is also fine if left to hang by the twine in a cool, dark, and dry place, such as a cold basement. It will last indefinitely, but the longer it hangs, the more it will dry (which some folks prefer).

Pork Hunter's Sausage

IF YOU'VE NEVER TRIED YOUR HAND at making dried sausages, this is a good recipe to start with. These sausages are small, easy to assemble, and in all, an excellent introduction to the world of sausage making. Their Italian name is *cacciatorini*, which means "little hunter," not unlike the classic *cacciatore*, hunter's stew.

Traditionally, *cacciatorini* were made into two small loops that could be easily hung from the waist on a leather belt, perfect for taking on a woodland hike or hunting expedition. When I head into the woods, I try to hold true to tradition and bring along a couple of these aromatic sausages for a light snack. They're so packed with zing that they stand up on their own. With a hand-torn baguette and a shady spot on the forest floor, I'm a happy guy.

Little Hunter's Sausage

MAKES ABOUT FIFTEEN 6-INCH-LONG SAUSAGES

Though air-dried sausages were traditionally made *au naturel*, that is, without the aid of a starter cultures, I add Fermento (see Resources, page 247), a dairy-based starter culture, to guarantee proper fermentation. Introducing a cultivated starter to sausage is like using store-bought yeast to make bread dough: it ensures safe, consistent results.

Using the large die ($^{5}/_{8}$ inch) of a meat grinder, grind

2¼ pounds cold, well-marbled, cubed pork butt

Put the pork in a large bowl. Now grind

1⅓ pounds cold chuck roast

and put it in the bowl with the pork.

In a spice grinder, process to a fine powder

1 tablespoon coriander seeds
¾ teaspoon whole white peppercorns
½ teaspoon ground mace

Transfer to a medium bowl and whisk in

⅓ cup dried milk powder

1½ tablespoons kosher salt

¾ teaspoon curing salt #2 (see page 112)

¾ teaspoon dextrose or granulated sugar

2 garlic cloves, finely minced

Add the spice blend to the ground meat. Wearing a pair of latex gloves, work the mixture until well combined.

Finely chop

½ pound pork fatback

¼ pound cold, well-marbled pork butt

Into a quart-size resealable plastic bag, put

1½ teaspoons black peppercorns

Seal the bag and put it on a cutting board. Using a heavy-bottomed pot, a skillet, or a rolling pin, smash the spices to break them up into smaller bits and set aside.

In a medium bowl, whisk together

1¾ ounces Fermento

1 tablespoon water

Once the Fermento is dissolved, add it to the ground meat, along with the chopped fatback, chopped pork, and the crushed peppercorns. Using your hands, vigorously mix the meat and spices until well combined and quite sticky. Heat a small nugget of the mixture in a small nonstick skillet over medium-high until cooked through. Cool, taste, and adjust the big batch of sausage filling as necessary. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate while you set up the sausage-making equipment (the meat can be refrigerated up to 24 hours).

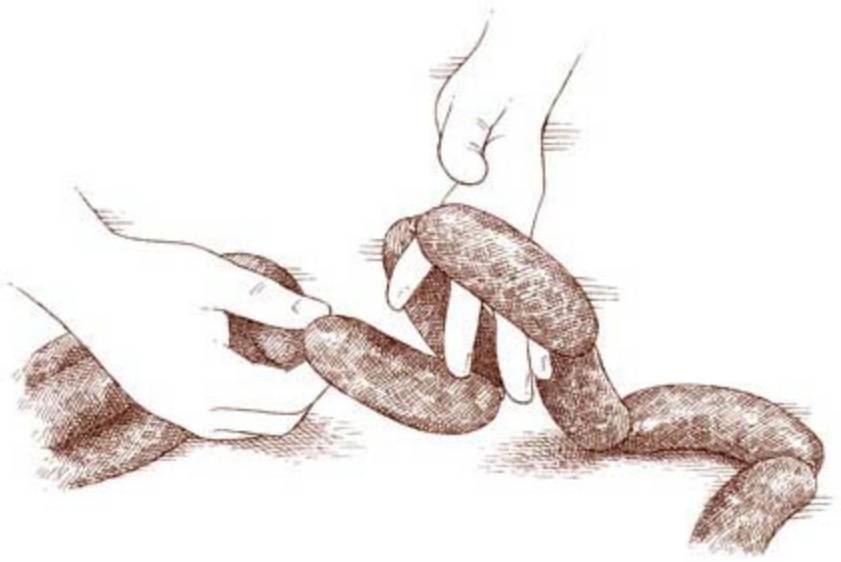
Into a medium bowl of cool water, mix

½ teaspoon white vinegar

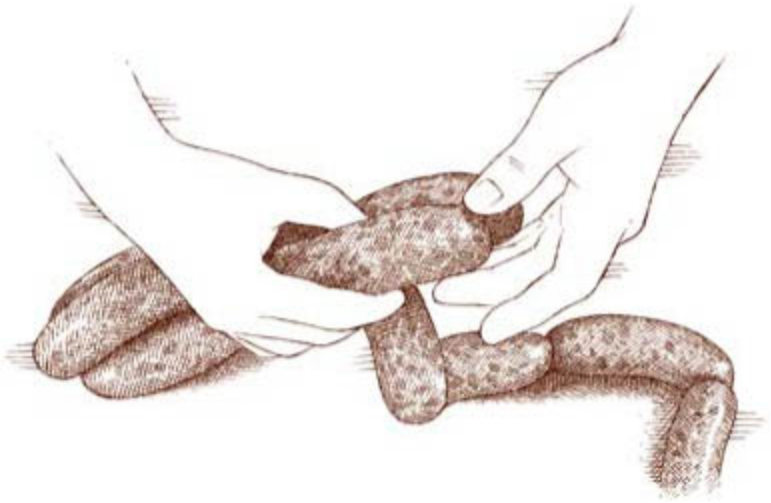
Add

¼ hank (approximately 25 feet) of natural hog casing

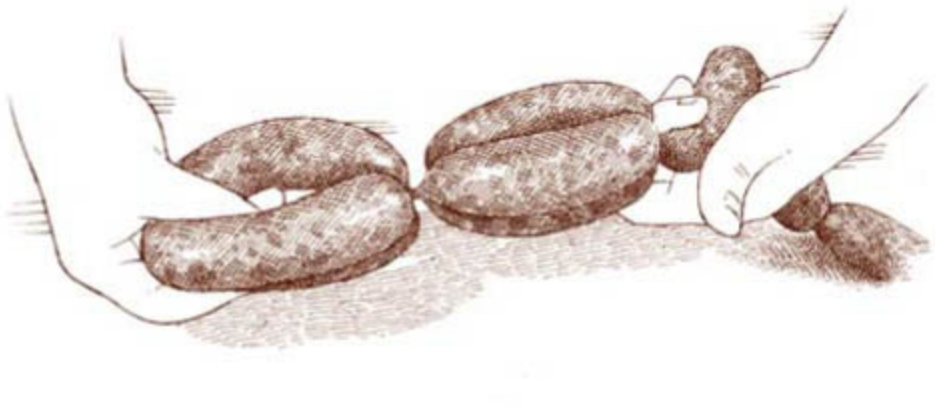
Let the casing sit in the vinegar water for 5 minutes, to soften the membranes and make the casing easier to handle. Remove the casing from the water and carefully slip the whole length of a casing onto the medium-size funnel of the sausage stuffer. Slowly crank until you see the first coils of meat come out the opposite end. Tie off the casing (this will minimize the amount of air in the sausage) and slowly crank in the rest of the meat, filling the casing $^{7}/_{8}$ full (you want to be able to easily twist off appropriate-size lengths) and letting the sausage coil into a naturally curved shape. I usually let this run until I have on my worktable a loop about the size of a bicycle tire.



1. *Collect 2 sausage links in your hand and twist to make a loop.*



2. *Send the next link through the loop.*



3. *Continue until all sausages are linked.*

Cut the casing from the stuffer. Measure 6 inches from the tied end and twist clockwise to create a sausage. (See Note.) Measure down another 6 inches and twist off another link, this time twisting counterclockwise. (Reversing twist direction prevents the links from unraveling.) Once you get to the last link, securely tie the end of the casing to seal it.

Once all of the sausages are filled and tied, check them for air pockets, and pop them with a needle. (Don’t worry about juices escaping. This is one of the wonders of sausage: the casing will reseal itself around the pinprick.) Now braid the sausages.

Put the sausages in a curing box (see Resources, page 247), set to 85°F, and cure for 12 hours. After this time, they should smell really good and they'll be a deep brick red. (This is the first sign that the proper fermentation is taking place and that the meat is becoming shelf stable.) If after 12 hours the sausages aren't at this stage, increase the temperature of the curing box to 95°F and let them cure for an additional 12 hours. If the sausages still look pasty or gray, discard them.

When they're ready, take out the sausages and hang them from hooks or rods where it's 55°F to 65°F (a basement or, if you're lucky, the wine cellar). Let them cure until they decrease in size by about 15 percent and have a semidry texture all the way through (slice the end of one link to check), 2 to 3 weeks.

When they're fully cured, wrap the sausages in several layers of plastic wrap and refrigerate. They'll keep in the fridge for up to 2 months.

NOTE: Somehow, I always burst a few sausages when I'm twisting off the links. Trust me — it happens to everyone. When it does, remove the excess sausage meat and put it back into the grinder for your next round of sausage. Twist off the sausage securely where the blowout occurred and continue on your merry sausage-making way.

Pork Kielbasa

KIELBASA, KOLBASZ, KOVBASA — no matter how you say it or spell it, to Eastern Europeans it means sausage. Not only do many countries have their unique version of the garlicky, juicy sausage, but as you explore sausage styles from city to city, from town to town, and from hamlet to hamlet, you'll find a multitude of variations.

I'll never forget the first time I met my wife Katka's grandparents, in the town of Litmanová in Slovakia, where she grew up. It's a small village set in a deep valley, among lush pastures and surrounded by steep mountainsides. Here they adhere to the ancient Eastern European tradition that mandates a trip home to visit grandma to be an all-out food fest of

homemade delights. It’s not unusual for a homecoming to be celebrated with bowls of hand-pinched pierogi, homemade chicken soup, stewed sauerkraut and pork, a goulash, perhaps some plum doughnuts, buttery cakes, crisp cookies, and other treats.

So imagine Babka’s shock when we arrived a day earlier than she expected us. Her jaw dropped, and although I do not understand her native dialect, from the look on her face and the patter of her language, I understood her message. She had not yet prepared a glorious welcome for us with food, food, and more food.

After everything had settled down, I was told to go sit with my wife’s grandfather, at the one multipurpose table in their home and share in some homemade slivovitz (see page 148). Meanwhile, Katka and her grandmother went off to the kitchen in the other room to try to fix up something for us to eat. Katka’s babka quickly brought out a bowl filled with yellow onions the size of golf balls and a hunk of country bread and then disappeared. I sipped slivovitz as Katka’s grandfather slowly peeled these onions with a small knife almost obscured by his gargantuan hands.

Babka reappeared, moving through the entryway with great speed, carrying a small piece of dark mahogany-colored sausage, which she deposited; then she left again. Her husband sliced off a piece and he and I began to eat and drink, taking a little piece of onion, some bread, some sausage, a shot of slivovitz, and then some more sausage. Babka appeared again, this time with a hunk of raw, darkly smoked bacon. Off she went, and we ate some more. The door opened, and there was Babka, now bearing a different kind of sausage, and then off she went again.

These goings and comings and the eating and drinking continued what seemed like 100 more times over the course of that night, with Babka delivering a new sausage every time. (After the first few rounds of sausage, through gestures and nods and shakes of the head, as neither I nor my in-laws spoke the other's language, we agreed to hide the quantity of slivovitz consumed, as Babka would not have approved.) The women never joined us, as they were too busy preparing chicken soup, pierogi, and cakes for the next day's official welcome lunch.

The story doesn't end here, though.

The next morning, I woke up sated (needless to say) from the sausages and the bread and the onions and the plum brandy and got a quick tour of the house and then of the land out back, where they keep some chickens. My

wife took me through the barn, past the scythe and the pitchforks, past the dry hay silage for the chicken coops, past the trunks that hold the handmade goose-down comforters, past the antique beech-slat sewing loom and over to a rickety wooden ladder that ascended three stories to a small space beneath the rafters. This is where her grandfather kept his sausage locker: a huge, deep chest filled with dowels that supported dozens and dozens of cured and smoked meats.

Incredulously I asked, “Is this where your babka was going to get the sausages last night? Out here? In the dark? In a barn? Up three ladders?”

Katka replied curtly: “Of course. Where did you *think* we keep our sausages?”

Garlicky Kielbasa

MAKES ABOUT 1 DOZEN 16-INCH-LONG SAUSAGES

Kielbasa is a mixed-grind sausage, meaning that when you slice into it, you’ll find a mosaic of pork chunks suspended in a smooth pork paste. Many old-timers say that all you need to make great kielbasa is quality pork, abundant garlic, and smoke, and I agree. My version follows this rule, but I add a little paprika, a touch of allspice, and some ground mustard to make it my own.

About 2 hours before you plan to make sausage, chill in the freezer

1 (5-pound) pork butt roast

While the pork chills, fit a meat grinder with a $^{3}/_{8}$-inch plate. Set up the sausage-making equipment. Into a medium bowl of cool water, mix

1½ teaspoons white vinegar

Add

15 feet of 38–42 mm natural hog middle casings *or* 38–40 mm beef rounds, cut and tied off into 18-inch lengths

Let the casings sit in the vinegar water for 5 minutes to soften the membranes and make them easier to handle.

In a large bowl, mix together

½ cup water
¼ cup kosher salt
1 tablespoon sweet paprika
2 teaspoons dry mustard
1 teaspoon ground allspice
1 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
1 teaspoon curing salt #1 (see page 112)

Remove the pork butt from the freezer and cut it into chunks small enough to fit through the meat grinder. Grind three-quarters of the meat, collecting it in a large bowl. Fit the meat grinder with the ¼-inch plate and grind the remaining pork butt with

½ small yellow onion, finely chopped
6 garlic cloves, finely chopped

Add the ground pork and onion mixture to the bowl with the larger-grind of pork. Add the spice slurry and knead, wearing latex gloves, until the mixture is well combined.

Remove the casings from the water. Load one 18-inch length of casing onto the sausage stuffer and fill until about 2 inches are left on the other end (the sausage should be pretty full but not packed to the brim). The sausage will automatically coil into the kielbasa's signature horseshoe shape. Gather the casing at the opposite end and compact the filling by moving your hand from the untied end down until the sausage feels taut and snappy. Tie off the other end of the sausage with butcher's twine. Tie the two ends together, securing the horseshoe into shape. Check the sausage for air pockets, and use a needle to pop any.

Put the sausages in a curing box (see Resources, page 247) set to 85°F and cure for 12 hours. After this time, they will smell really good and the color will be deep brick red. (This is the first sign that the proper fermentation is taking place and that the meat is becoming shelf stable.) If the sausages aren't at this stage, increase the temperature of the curing box to 95°F and let them cure for an additional 12 hours. If the sausages still look gray, discard them.

Transfer the sausages to an unheated smoke box and set the temperature to 140°F. Smoke on a heavy smudge (see page 23) for at least 2½ hours (up to 12 hours for a smokier kielbasa). After 2½ hours, increase the temperature to 155°F and smoke until the sausage's internal temperature reaches 152°F, 30 to 45 minutes longer.

Immediately hang the kielbasa from hooks or rods in the refrigerator to cool down quickly and either leave them there (to be consumed fresh and moist) or hang them in a cool, dry place for at least 24 hours (up to 14 days if you like a drier kielbasa). Once the kielbasa is dried to your liking, wrap the sausages snugly in several layers of plastic wrap and refrigerate. They'll keep, refrigerated, for 2 months.

5 BANKS & WETLANDS: FRESHWATER DEPTHS AND SHORES

IF I WAS GIVEN A CHOICE of where to spend my day, it would be on the bank of a rushing brook where the water moves fast enough to challenge my footing yet is shallow enough to keep me from ending up downriver. I love the feeling of my feet sinking into the mud; it reminds me of how fertile the soil is. Wetland and coastline are the landscapes I enjoy equally with two

senses: hearing and sight. That said, wetlands have a slight edge in that within them I can find coexisting habitats: a gurgling stream running through a forest, a freshwater pond in the mountains, or a lake in pastureland.

When I head to banks and wetlands, I'm probably going fishing, so I have a purpose. Everything living, at some point, comes to water. Surrounding these sources of life-giving and life-sustaining water is an array of edibles that are easy to spot, pick, and carry home. Thus, even when the fish aren't biting, I can return home with a sack full of wild ramps or cattails for pickling and know my outing was a fruitful one. On lucky fishing trips, not just when the trout are running but when I'm in the company of a hunter, a pheasant or duck destined for sausage, prosciutto, or a confit can be a take-home prize as well.

The season to visit depends on what you want to do: spring is the best for fishing and foraging, but if hunting is your thing, fall is your time. I'm partial to spring. When the wetlands welcome spawns and the first hatches, you discover what the fish are likely to bite. For avid fly fisherman, the type of insect hatching is the biggest tell in the ecology; if you're trying to understand the makeup of wetlands, look to the insects for the first piece of the story. And the emergence of wild vegetation along a freshwater bank is often the first sign of the spring's approach, before lawns green up, before meadows and fields come alive with plants. If a farmer has a pond or a creek on her property, you'll likely find her there on dewy spring mornings. That's where she'll gather alliums, fiddleheads, and forageable greens such as purslane and watercress to sell at the farmers' markets or to cook for her family.

When I plan a menu, I'm inspired by setting as well as by season. As I think about how to serve a plump, early-spring brook trout (whether caught by my hand or purchased from a fishmonger), I envision myself standing knee-deep in water with my fishing rod and satchel. I imagine what surrounds me — maybe cattails and fiddlehead ferns — and then I begin to picture the plate: fire-grilled trout, gently pickled cattails, and butter-sautéed fiddleheads. Then it comes into focus: an edible landscape on a plate.

Fiddlehead Ferns

IN THE WORLD OF FINE DINING, fiddleheads are one of the "luxury wild" ingredients that crop up on menus in early spring. Like clockwork, every May the prehistoric-looking coils emerge from the ground and appear in greenmarkets (and some natural foods markets) all along the Northeast and in the Pacific Northwest. Known as fiddlehead ferns because they look like the curlicue top of a violin, they're sautéed, boiled, or steamed and dressed with butter and lemon juice.

Fiddleheads are unfurled ostrich ferns. They grow wild in damp and thickly wooded areas until late June. Once they break through the earth, foragers have just a couple of weeks to find them, knife in hand and poised to sever the tender stalks from their earthen bed.

After that, fiddleheads uncoil and become, well, ferns.

Foraging for fiddleheads is nothing new. No doubt the Native Americans enjoyed the tender greens long before any colonists set foot on the continent. There are records of late-eighteenth-century Canadian settlers following the example of the Maliseet Indians and eating the young ferns.

I love the look of these spiral edibles, but I must be honest and say that I'm not the biggest fan of their taste, which is somewhat like asparagus but not as good. When boiled fresh, to me they're somewhat fibrous and brittle. In addition, they're highly perishable: they turn "off" and shrivel within a day or two of being cut.

This prejudice of mine changed as soon as I tried my hand at pickling them. That's when a new world of fiddlehead possibilities opened up. The fibrous inner furl of the fern acts as a sponge, soaking in the garlicky, herbed brine like no other vegetable does. I can't think of a single pickle that looks anything like it or spurs so much conversation around the table.

> *The W. S. Wells + Sons Cannery, in Wilton, Maine, family-owned and -operated since 1894, is the only cannery in the United States that specializes in fiddlehead ferns.*

Pickled Fiddlehead Ferns

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

Fiddlehead ferns are best immediately after picking, or refrigerated for 24 hours at most. Before cooking, snap off any stem and rub off any papery brown chaff that's clinging to the coil. Plunge in several successions of cold water to dislodge any dirt before pickling.

In a medium saucepan, bring to a boil

- **2 cups rice wine vinegar**
- **1 cup water**
- **8 garlic cloves, smashed**
- **2 small dried Pepin chiles, halved lengthwise, or 1½ tablespoons red pepper flakes**
- **2 tablespoons kosher salt**
- **2 tablespoons sugar**
- **1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns**
- **1 tablespoon cumin seeds**
- **2 teaspoons yellow mustard seeds**

Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, among four 8-ounce jars, divide

4 cups cleaned and trimmed fiddlehead ferns

4 sprigs fresh dill

4 sprigs fresh thyme

Pour the brine over each jar of fiddleheads and immediately screw on the lids. Following the instructions for canning on page 21, process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 12 minutes. Store in a cool, dark, and dry spot for at least 1 week before using.

Wild Ramps

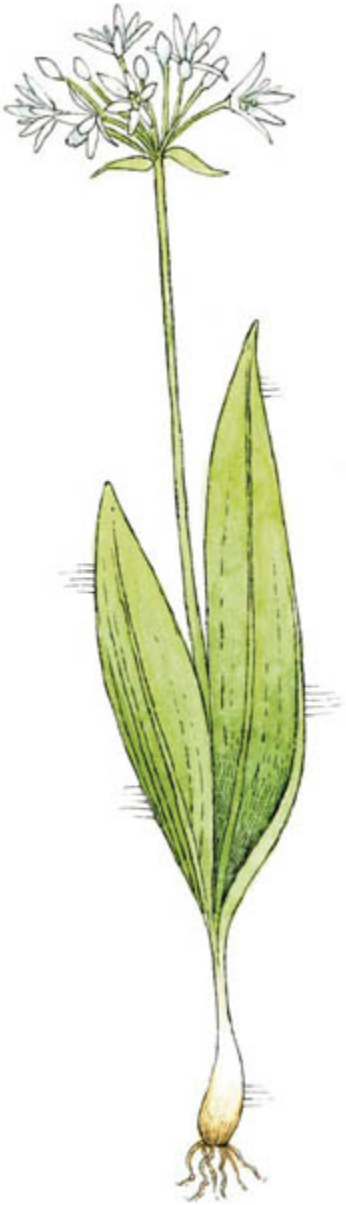
RAMPS TASTE THE WAY I IMAGINE the original onion, leek, or garlic tasted before it was cultivated. Among chefs, ramps are the most celebrated members of the allium family, because they have the most pungent, wild flavor of any onion. It doesn't hurt that they're harbingers of spring as well, a first taste of the summer produce to come.

Also known as wild leeks, ramps look like big scallions. They often grow in wet, muddy, and messy conditions, but instead of focusing on the muck I look at the bright side: even in the most unappealing places, the land offers sublime treasures to those willing to go in and harvest them.

The best way to eat these delicacies is as unadulterated as possible: stewed in butter and tossed over fresh noodles with a good shaving of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. But because in season they grow like an Appalachian wildfire, I have developed a number of ways to preserve them, to enjoy whenever the fancy strikes. I usually split the plant into two parts: I use the leaves to make a sharp pesto that will bring an oniony and wild taste to any plain dish; from the bulbs, I make a delectable pickle scented with pink peppercorns and fennel seeds.

Aside from its flavor, I love the pickle's light pink blush. All alliums contain amino acids that through changes in pH (for example, covering them with vinegar, an acid), turn either pink or blue. When I make my

Classic Dill Pickles (see page 124), a by-product is blue garlic cloves, and I just don’t know what to do with them. But when I developed this pickle recipe, I noticed that nine times out of ten, I ended up with a soft pink slip of a pickle that was as attractive to look at as it was delicious to eat. Over time, I discovered a way to encourage this pinking and now have almost perfect results every time. And on that rare occasion when they don’t pink up, even though I don’t get the visual satisfaction I was looking for, they still taste pretty damn good.



True Wild Rice

I love when a food evokes the landscape from which it comes. Wild rice — true wild rice, called *manoomin* by the Anishinaabeg of Minnesota — achieves this, and perhaps better than any other ingredient I know. It smells like a combination of tea leaves and hay, tastes like toasted grass, and has a wonderfully chewy texture.

Wild rice isn't rice at all, but rather the seed of a tall grass. You can't compare the cultivated "wild" rice that's sold in markets, often mixed with white rice to boot, with this foraged seed. It's like comparing store-bought whole-wheat sandwich bread with a dense, complex European sprouted loaf.

Real North American wild rice grows on the banks of the Great Lakes, as well as at the edges of ponds and rivers in the north-central part of the United States. It's traditionally harvested in the fall, when the stalks are heavy with the rice heads. After paddling a canoe to where the grasses grow, seed heads are hit with an oar or stick and the rice falls right into the canoe.

When I eat the rice, I appreciate the efforts of the people who went out in their canoes and collected the wild rice using methods that have been in effect for thousands of years. In a world where our attention span is only as long as the last blog post or twitter feed, this knowledge comforts me.

I enjoy wild rice pilaf-style, sautéed with shallots or garlic. This is one of the few foods to which I don't add any herbs; I like to savor the earthiness of the rice without any diversion. Wild rice is worthy of any game bird or lake fish that gave up its life. Serve with pickles on the side.

Pink Peppercorn–Pickled Ramps

MAKES 1 PINT (TWO 8-OUNCE JARS)

Wild ramps grow in muck. When they’re pulled from the ground, the mud clings to the bulbs with a vengeance. Like the rest of their cousins in the onion family, ramps have a very fine papery skin protecting the bulb. Unlike other alliums, however, you must do everything in your power *not* to slip off the skin, as this is where the pigments reside that will transform the ramps into beautifully rosy pickles. During the cleaning process, work slowly with a small paring knife and a bowl of fresh water to gently scrape the mud off the bulbs. Your care will pay off.

Carefully clean

1 pound fresh ramps

Hold a ramp by the bulb end and, with kitchen shears, snip off the greens just above the point where the leaves begin. (There should be a faint magenta ribbon on the shoot; this is what helps the ramps turn pink.) Set aside the greens to later sauté to dress risotto or pasta, or turn them into pesto (see page 223).

Sterilize two 8-ounce jars (see page 19). Divide the ramp bulbs between the jars.

To make the brine, in a medium saucepan, bring to a boil

2 cups white wine vinegar

1 cup water

¾ cup sugar

1 tablespoon whole pink peppercorns

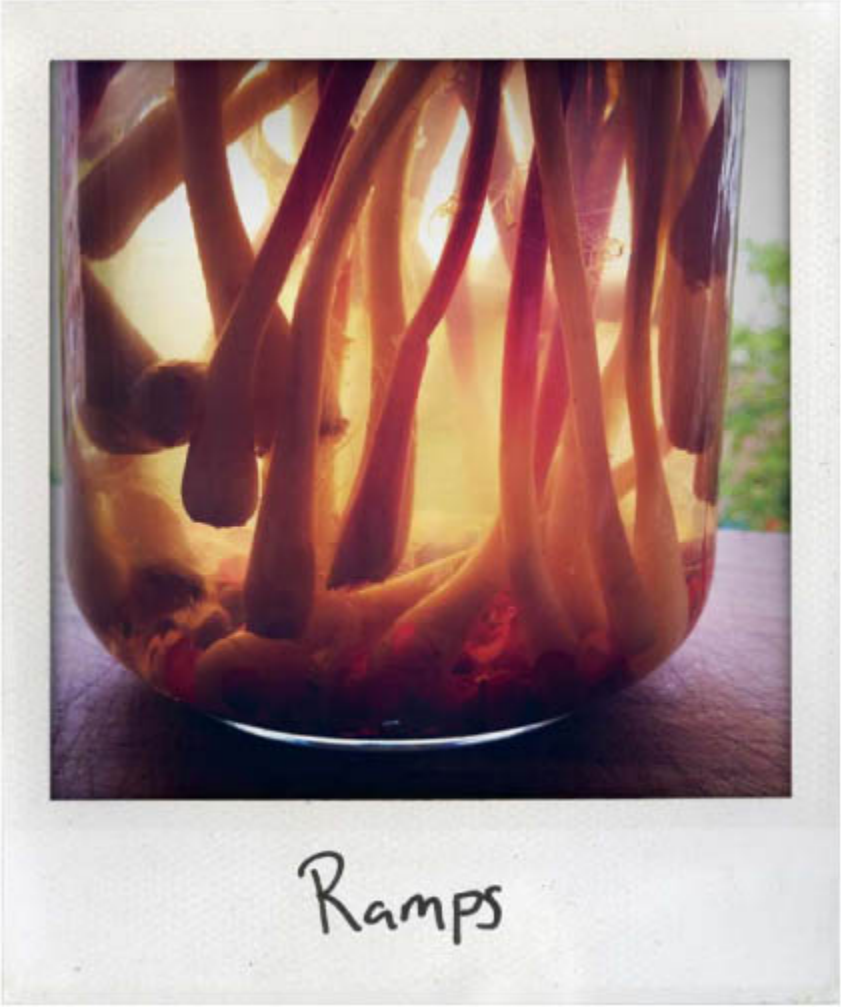
2 teaspoons fennel seeds

2 teaspoons kosher salt

1 teaspoon coriander seeds

Stir a few times to dissolve the sugar. When the brine comes to a boil, turn off the heat and pour it over the ramps. Screw on the lids and, following the instructions for canning on page 21, process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 15 minutes. Set the ramps aside at room temperature for 1 week before serving. Unopened, they keep on a shelf in a cool, dark, and dry spot for up to 1 year.

NOTE: As the season progresses, ramps continue to mature and become bigger and tougher. If the ramps you have sport bulbs that are larger than a scallion in size, tenderize them before pickling: Cook them in the boiling brine for 1 minute. Then remove them with a slotted spoon or tongs, cool, divide between the sterilized jars, bring the brine back to a boil, and then continue with the directions above.



WILD RAMP AND WALNUT PESTO

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

This pesto couldn’t be easier. The ramps give it a heady, oniony, garlicky twang that’s one of my favorite tastes of spring. I use walnuts because their tannins help to cut the spiciness and funk of the ramps. Throw in a handful of fresh herbs such as basil, marjoram, or summer savory (savory is great if you want the pesto on pizza) to enhance the flavor but make it less oniony. Sometimes I stir a spoonful of fresh ricotta into some of the pesto before tossing it with pasta for a bold, creamy sauce.

Put into the bowl of a food processor

3 packed cups coarsely chopped ramp leaves

Add

¾ cup lightly toasted walnuts
¼ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Pour in 3 tablespoons of

fruity extra-virgin olive oil

Add

½ teaspoon kosher salt

Begin to process the mixture. Once it's roughly combined, drizzle more olive oil through the feed tube until you get a somewhat smooth and thick paste.

Stop the processor and taste the pesto. Adjust the salt as needed, then scrape the pesto into a glass jar or other container. Pour 2 teaspoons of olive oil over the top of the pesto — this will help keep the pesto a fresh and attractive shade of green — cover, and refrigerate. The pesto will keep, refrigerated, for up to 3 weeks.

Cattails

THE WAY I COOK AND THINK ABOUT FOOD was inspired by reading Euell Gibbons's *Stalking the Wild Asparagus* in college. First printed in 1962, the book is about foraging for edibles — cattails, lamb's-quarters, stinging nettles, puffball mushrooms — in one's natural surroundings, be they pristine wetlands or a vacant lot.

When I was in college, although I enjoyed hiking, I pretty much could not identify any wild edible except for the instantly recognizable cattail. Cattails became my guinea pigs as I began to see the world around me as an edible pantry of curiosities and delights. I'd follow Gibbons's recipe of

steaming them and serving them with butter. It’s the go-to recipe for any wild edible, bound to make it taste good and difficult to mess up.

To the amateur forager, cattail shoots look similar to leeks. They have about 2 inches of white at the base, followed by a light green top that gets a little darker farther up the stalk. The only edible part of the stalk is the inner white stem, which will feel tender and juicy when squeezed; the outer layers are harder and more fibrous. The flavor of the cattail shoot (which one farmer-friend calls “wild hearts of palm”) is extremely mild. Some folks say the mellow, clean, juiciness of the raw cattail resembles that of a cucumber, but the beauty of the shoot is its ability to absorb other flavors, which is one of the reasons I like to prepare cattails as pickles. I force some taste into them using a brine laden with dill and garlic, and then add some spice.

The other reason I like to turn cattails into pickles is that when you find one, you find *a lot*. Ever seen a pond with just a lone cattail? Me neither — which is why hunting for cattails is an excellent foraging adventure for newcomers to the hobby, and for those of us who on occasion crave guaranteed gratification.

These pickles seem to pair naturally with foods that come from a similar environment: trout (smoked), wild rice, duck (roasted), and greens foraged from a freshwater bank, such as purslane and watercress.

Cossack Pickles

MAKES 2¼ QUARTS (SIX 12-OUNCE JARS)

At 3 inches long, the cattail shoots will stand upright in 12-ounce canning jars. If yours are too long, trim them to fit; if they’re too short, call on your Tetris skills (video games are good for something) and stack them to fit.

Among six 8-ounce glass jars, evenly divide

6 garlic cloves, quartered

2 teaspoons caraway seeds

2 teaspoons dill seeds

1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

On the cutting board, trim the bottoms, remove the hard outside, and rinse the centers of

2 pounds cattail shoots

Cut off the dark green tops, just where the light green turns dark (the shoots should then be about 3 inches long).

Peel away the outer layers of the stalk until the tender white center remains. Divide the trimmed cattails right-side up among the jars, packing them in as tightly as possible without crushing or bruising the stalks.

In a medium pot, bring to a boil

2 cups white vinegar

2¼ cups water

¼ cup kosher salt

Pour the brine over the cattails. Screw on the lids, then tap each jar twice on the cutting board to release any trapped air. Following the instructions for canning on page 21, process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 10 minutes. Store the cattails in a cool, dark, and dry spot for 1 week before serving.

Freshwater Trout

MY WIFE THINKS I'M AN AWFUL FISHERMAN because I rarely come home with a catch. She doesn't always believe me when I tell her that when I go fishing, my goal isn't just a fish. The catch is only one result of casting a line.

The sound of running water is therapy for me. It clears my head of all of the urban noise I'm inundated with daily — taxi horns, people talking on their cell phones, music blaring from car radios — as well as the clamor of a commercial kitchen: the clanking of pots and pans, the deafening sound of

the overhead vent fan; the jangling of an endless stream of plates, glasses, and cutlery going from dining room to dishwasher. To be by the water, especially rivers and creeks, is my escape. Whether or not I catch a fish doesn't make much difference.

I do catch some, on occasion, and when I do, if I don't fire them on an on-site grill, I bring them home to smoke.

A well-smoked trout lends itself to countless applications at the table. It makes a wonderful addition to breakfast dishes, such as poached eggs over toast; lightly flaked with watercress, lemon, and fresh herbs, it's nice in a light salad for lunch; mashed into some crème fraîche and smeared on a griddled baguette and finished with snipped chives, it makes a tempting hors d'oeuvre. But my favorite way to indulge in this delicate fish is outside with only my fingers to pick the meat from the bones, oh, and maybe a heel of crusty bread.

For hikes and other outdoor adventures, smoked trout takes second place only to a home-cured sausage. Leave it whole and it's portable and particularly gorgeous laid out on simple butcher's paper, its golden, mottled body glistening in the sun.

Fish and meat must be cured to begin the drying process before you smoke it. There are two ways to cure, wet and dry, with both counting on salt to draw out moisture. Brine is a liquid-based salt-sugar-spice solution (as in a Black Forest ham); a dry-cure is essentially a dry rub made from salt, sugar, and spices (as in gravlax). For trout and similar-size fish, I prefer the brine method for a few reasons.

First, it's quick and easy. Second, the liquid of a brine helps keep the smoked fish moist. Third, I love the metallic sheen of the fish when it comes out of the smoker.

Feel free to tweak the flavor profile wherever your tastes take you, but mind the ratio of salt to sugar to water to achieve excellent results every time. I like rosemary in this otherwise simple brine: the herb's light piney notes recall the resinous perfumes that hug the creeks of my beloved Catskill woods. Among other herbs and spice pairings that go harmoniously with

the brine are fennel seed and thyme; tarragon and citrus zest; and dill and fresh garlic.

Hot Smoked Trout

MAKES 2 SMOKED TROUT

In this preparation, after lightly curing the fish, cook them all the way through. By gradually increasing the heat in the smoke chamber as you go, you are “kippering,” a treatment that gives the fish its signature mahogany-gold lacquer on skin and flesh. If you’ve had a wildly successful day on the water, you can always double or even triple the quantities in this recipe, but two trout is about as ambitious as I get.

In a large pot, bring to a boil

6 cups water
2 cups light brown sugar
1 cup kosher salt
zest of ½ lemon
1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns
1½ teaspoons coriander seeds
1 sprig fresh rosemary

Turn off the heat and allow the brine to come to room temperature, then transfer it to a large airtight container and refrigerate until it's cold. Into the brine, put

2 (8- to 12-inch) head-on, gutted, and rinsed trout

Use a plate to weight down the trout so that they're submerged. Cover the container and refrigerate for at least 6 and up to 12 hours.

Remove the fish from the brine and blot with a kitchen towel. Set a flat cooling rack on top of a rimmed baking sheet, then put the fish on the rack. Refrigerate for 6 hours, to dry the fish completely.

Put the trout in an unheated smoker (see Resources, page 247) and heat it to 120°F. Let the fish smoke for 1½ hours, which enables the smoke to penetrate the fish and kipper it. Increase the heat to 170°F and smoke the fish until its internal temperature is 165°F, 30 to 45 minutes. Remove the trout from the smoker and either serve it immediately or wrap it in parchment or waxed paper and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

NOTE: This trout, even after being refrigerated, can be held at room temperature for a few hours, which is helpful if you want to take it on a hike.

Pheasant

PHEASANTS ARE AMONG THE PRETTIEST of the common game birds. Their decorative neck coloring and plumage make them an easy target for hunters, and so, to their great misfortune, they've held an honored place on our table for centuries. A distant relative of the chicken, its meat is one of the mildest you'll get from the wild.

Pheasants maneuver in the air and on land. This combination of flying and strutting strengthens and toughens their muscles, which is why the birds were traditionally hung by their feet to relax their flesh and ripen. Tradition held that a pheasant was not ready to be cooked until she dropped from her feet naturally, bringing this otherwise mild-flavored bird into a full-on funky flavor that is even a little too gamy for my tastes.

But no matter how long you cook the legs of these birds, the tendons will never break down (this is true of turkeys, too, as they live a similar lifestyle). To solve this problem, I make a confit out of the leg meat and then shred it into a tender, country-style spread. To get the most flavor from the bird, I scent the fat with an abundance of spices and citrus.

Pheasant Rillette

MAKES 1 QUART (FOUR 8-OUNCE JARS)

There are three steps to making a rillette, a rustic, pâté-like spread that has a wonderfully meaty texture: curing, cooking in fat, and then shredding and mixing with herbs. A rillette can be made from duck, pork, and even salmon. For pheasant, I like to add herbaceous and piney fragrances to the cure, as they remind me of the pheasant's woodland diet and habitat.

In a roasting pan, stir until blended

1½ cups kosher salt

1½ cups sugar

3 bunches fresh thyme

½ cup coriander seeds

3 tablespoons allspice berries

3 tablespoons whole black peppercorns

3 tablespoons juniper berries

Add

4 pheasant leg quarters

Rub the mixture into the legs, and then bury them in it. Tightly cover the pan with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 48 hours.

DAY 3

Heat the oven to 200°F. Remove the legs from the cure and brush off any stuck-on bits of the mix. Discard the remaining cure and wipe out the roasting pan. Return the pheasant legs to the pan, then add

rind from 1 orange (scrape off the white pith)

8 garlic cloves (approximately 1 head), smashed

1 (1-inch) fresh ginger, sliced into ¼-inch-thick rounds

2 sprigs fresh thyme

1 sprig fresh rosemary

3 tablespoons whole black peppercorns

3 tablespoons crushed juniper berries

6 allspice berries or star anise

1 cinnamon stick

Pour in

2 quarts (8 cups) simmering chicken or duck fat

Tightly cover the pan with aluminum foil, put it in the oven, and cook until the meat is tender but not falling off the bone, about 3 hours. Carefully remove the legs from the fat, then strain the fat through a sieve. Discard the herbs and spices and reserve the fat, setting it aside to cool to room temperature (the fat should still be in a liquid state).

To make the rillette, remove the meat from the bones and shred into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment.

Add

2 shallots, finely minced
2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves
few pinches of freshly ground black pepper

Mix on medium speed until creamy, about 2 minutes. Taste, then adjust the salt if necessary.

Sterilize four 8-ounce jars and lids (see page 19). Divide the rillette among the still-warm jars, packing each to within 1 inch of a jar's lip. Cover the meat with the reserved fat, bringing the volume to within ½ inch of the jar's lip. Following the instructions for canning on page 21, process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 20 minutes. Store on a shelf in a cool, dark, and dry spot for up to 1 year. The rillette will keep in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Duck Legs

THERE'S A REASON THAT DUCK CONFIT is on the menu at every French bistro.

The least expensive way for a restaurant to purchase duck is whole, then it's butchered on-site. The breasts are the choice cuts, and although they're delicious, the chef is left with more than half the bird: the drumsticks and thighs. Cooking those cuts low and slow in a pot of duck fat transforms them into rich and fork-tender meat that's full of flavor. In addition — and here's the magic — the thighs and drumsticks can be preserved in the fat for months, thereby minimizing waste and maximizing, well, profit.

Preserving meat in fat is an ancient curing method. In cold climates around the world, ceramic crocks are still buried beneath the earth where they are kept for many months to come. I imagine a farm wife in northern France, trudging through the snow, unearthing a crock, removing as many legs as she needs, and then carefully resealing the legs with a fresh layer of duck

fat. Storing food in the cold earth was the first form of refrigeration. It's nature's icebox.

The first time you make duck confit, you'll have to buy some already rendered duck fat (unless you save the fat from cooking the breasts); after cooking that first batch of the confit, however, you'll end up with a nice supply to use in more ways than you could ever anticipate. Duck fat keeps indefinitely in the fridge. As long as it's sealed so it doesn't absorb any odors, confit fat gets better with time — the flavor deepens as it ages. Like a bread starter or a vinegar "mother," some of the confit fat in my refrigerator probably goes back a decade.

One of the great things about roasted duck confit is that after the confit process is complete, the leg itself, once removed and crisped in a pan, is fairly lean, even as it remains succulent and über ducky. And the duck fat, well, there are countless uses for it. I love it for making extra-crisp pan-fried or roasted potatoes, roasting vegetables, basting steaks, and poaching meaty fish such as wild striped bass, tuna, and swordfish.

The most curious use for duck fat, however, is in the purview of my wife, and of all the other women who swear by traditional Eastern European remedies. In winter, at the first signs of a chest cold, she applies a nice schmear of duck fat across her chest as if it were Vicks Vapor Rub (she doesn't discriminate — she'll use goose fat for this purpose, too). It's my favorite perfume, and we suffer together: she from her cold, and I because her remedy makes me hungry.

Confit

Confit comes from the French *confire,* "to prepare." Over time, forms of the word have come to mean a variety of foods that have been preserved in particular ways. For example, a fruit confiture relies on sugar as its preservative; duck confit relies on fat.

Citrus-and-Spice Confit of Duck Leg

MAKES 6 DUCK LEGS

My version of classic duck confit incorporates aromatic citrus, herbs, and spices for a bouquet that is captured and preserved by the duck fat. The addition of a small amount of sugar cures the meat without leaving it too salty. Reserve the last of the fat that renders off the crisped duck legs to smear on a piece of bread, or combine with a touch of mustard and red wine vinegar to dress a green salad.

Into a quart-size resealable plastic bag, put

3 tablespoons black peppercorns
3 tablespoons whole coriander seeds
3 tablespoons juniper berries

With the bottom of a heavy skillet, lightly crush the spices. Put 2 tablespoons in a medium bowl (reserve the rest) and add

2 tablespoons kosher salt
2 tablespoons sugar
2 sprigs fresh thyme

Rub the spice mixture over

6 duck leg quarters

Put the spiced duck legs in a nonreactive roasting pan or large plastic container, cover, and refrigerate for 2 days.

DAY 3

Preheat the oven to 200°F. Remove the legs from the cure and, with a pastry brush, wipe off the spices. Wipe out the roasting pan and return the legs to it. Put the reserved spice mixture in a medium bowl and add

16 garlic cloves (about 2 large heads), peeled and smashed
rind of 1 orange, pith scraped off

5 star anise pods, lightly crushed

5 fresh thyme sprigs

3 fresh rosemary sprigs

1½ cinnamon sticks

Sprinkle this mixture over the duck legs. In a large pot, warm

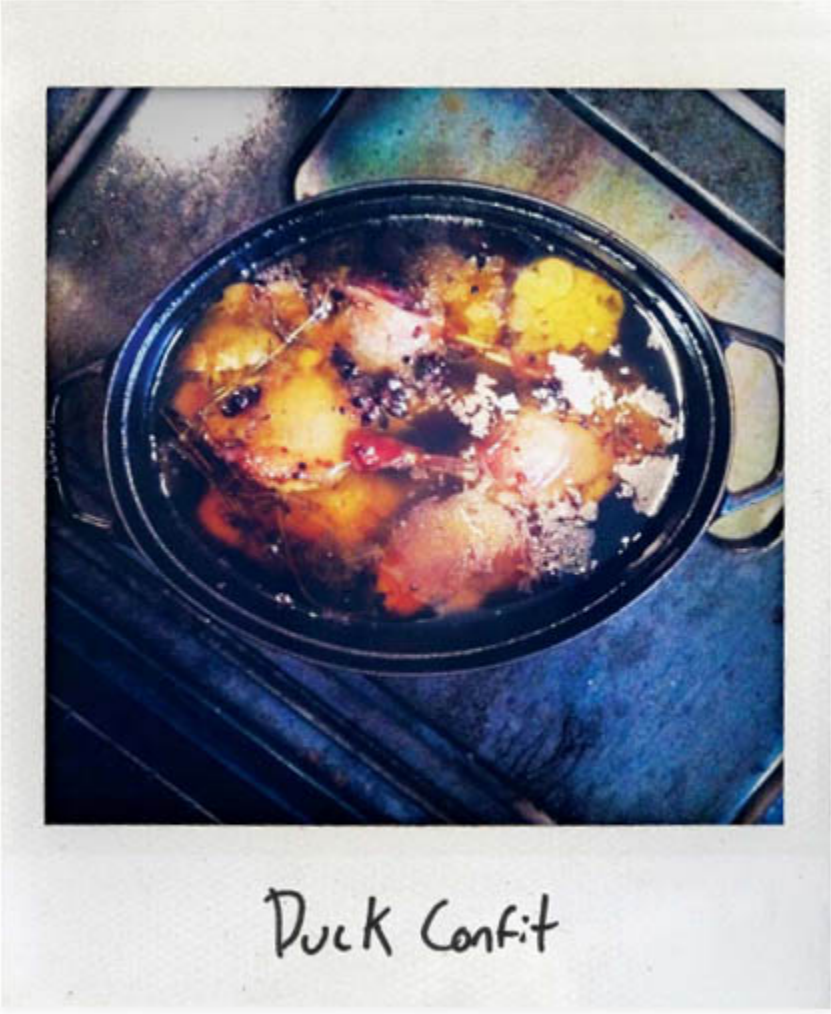
8 cups duck fat

Pour the duck fat over the legs and set the roasting pan over medium-low heat. Bring the fat to a simmer, then immediately turn off the heat. Tightly wrap the pan with a few sheets of aluminum foil and put the pan in the oven. Cook until the meat is tender but not falling off the bone, about 3 hours.

With a slotted spoon and tongs, gently transfer the duck legs to the clean baking dish or airtight container in which you plan to store the legs. Pour the fat through a fine-mesh sieve directly over the legs. Cover with plastic wrap or a tight-fitting lid and refrigerate for up to 1 year.

To reheat the duck legs, carefully remove from the fat, using your hand to scrape off as much fat as possible. Put the duck on a rimmed baking sheet and broil until the skin is crisp and sizzling.

NOTE: You can substitute for up to a quarter of the duck fat used to confit with a neutral oil, such as grapeseed or canola. Don’t substitute more than a quarter, or the fat won’t solidify and the legs won’t confit properly.



Duck Breast

UNLIKE MANY TYPES OF SAUSAGES and cured meats, which are often made with affordable off-cuts and trim, this recipe calls for the premium duck breasts. Although this may make home-cured duck prosciutto seem expensive, through curing, the meat becomes so concentrated in flavor that a few thin slices will please the most ravenous appetite. Six good-size duck breasts (preferably from Moulard ducks; these are the same ducks that produce *foie gras* and thus have ample meat) are enough to impress you, your friends, and even a few of theirs.

Duck Prosciutto

MAKES 6 PROSCIUTTO-STYLE BREASTS

In a traditional pork prosciutto, the layer of fat surrounding the meat insulates it, preventing it from drying out and becoming brittle. Instead of curing the duck breast flat, as many home-curers might do, I roll the meat into a cylinder: this creates a fat cap that keeps the meat supple and tender. It's an extra step, but the amount of time it takes is worth it for the superior taste and texture that will reward you. Eat duck prosciutto as you would pork prosciutto — on a charcuterie board, on bruschetta, in a sandwich, or tossed in a salad. Its intense taste is perfect paired with fresh citrus, allium, and stewed fruit.

In a medium bowl, stir together

¼ cup sugar
zest of 1 orange
2 sprigs fresh thyme
needles from 1 small sprig rosemary
½ teaspoon curing salt #1 (see page 112)

Put in a quart-size resealable plastic bag

¼ cup juniper berries
2 whole cloves

With the bottom of a heavy pan, lightly crush the spices and then put them in a skillet with

4 allspice berries

Toast over medium heat until they're fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add

½ cup kosher salt

Shake the pan to toss, turn off the heat, and pour the mixture over the sugar-herb mixture in the bowl. Stir to combine, then set aside until completely cooled.

With the cooled spice mix, evenly coat both sides of

6 boneless, skin-on duck breasts

Put the meat in a 9- by 13-inch baking dish, tightly cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 2 days. Turn the duck breasts, re-cover the pan, and refrigerate for 1 more day (72 hours in total).

DAY 4

Remove the pan from the refrigerator. Wearing gloves, wipe away the excess cure from each breast and then massage the meat, bending it back and forth until you can easily roll it into a long cylinder. The layer of fat and skin should encase the meat almost completely (this is what will keep the prosciutto tender). Tightly wrap the cylinder in a piece of cheesecloth, and with kitchen twine, truss it into a uniform shape (see illustration, below). Attach a loop of string to the trussed breast and hang the prosciutto in a cool, dark, and dry spot until the fat is fairly translucent, the prosciutto has lost about 15 percent of its weight, and it feels firm when squeezed, from 10 to 14 days.

To serve, remove the cheesecloth and slice the prosciutto crosswise into paper-thin sheaths.

Store the uncut portion wrapped in plastic wrap for up to 2 months.

Twist the end of the string around and around to tighten the cylinder.

Goose

GOOSE-NECK SAUSAGES ARE AMONG the first sausages ever made. Some folks argue that they were indeed the very first. Recipes that were passed down from the ancient Greeks and Romans were perfected by the tribes of wandering non-pork-eating, kosher-keeping Jews who settled in parts of Italy and France. With its rich, gamy flavor and its long, arching shape, a goose neck is practically begging to be stuffed and eaten. You can eat it fresh, boiled, or smoked, but I prefer smoking: a great way to preserve the meat to last through winter.

If you've shot the goose yourself, sever the head beginning next to the chin on one side and follow the wishbone as closely as possible to the breast to give you enough length of casing (the neck becomes the casing) to make a

sausage. Or go to the greenmarket or the butcher and ask whether there's a whole goose with the neck attached. There are still some who are butchering geese this way, especially at the local level. (A duck neck will work well in a pinch; handle it the same way.)

The recipe that follows is a sausage made from 100 percent goose meat, which keeps to kosher dietary laws. Plenty of cooks augment the meat paste with pork and pork fat in order to ensure that the meat stays juicy, but to me that's like stuffing merguez sausage into a hog casing: you just don't do it. In order to achieve a juicy sausage without pig fat, I do two things: I grind and emulsify the goose skins with some water and I add ground dried apricots.

Goose Neck and Whiskey Sausage

MAKES FOUR 6-INCH SAUSAGES

I usually make the filling from the legs and thighs of the goose, reserving the breast meat for a roast with cabbage and apples, but as all goose meat is technically "lean," you may use whatever you find in the market or have on hand. At the restaurant, we collect and salt the neck skins over a number of weeks until we have enough to make a batch of sausage. You could do the same, or try an Asian market to buy the neck skins. Save ½ pound of goose skin (from the back, legs, and thighs) for the filling.

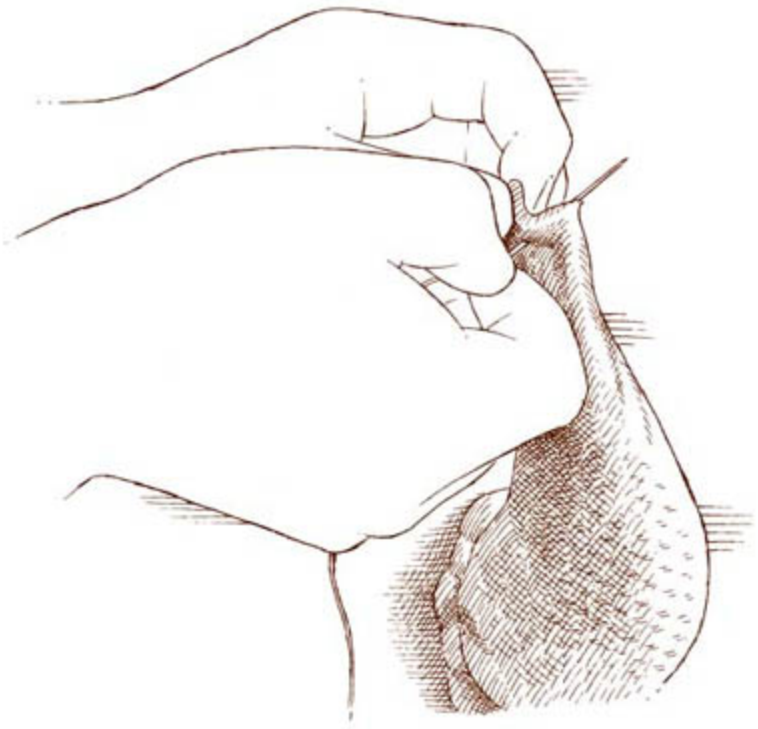
On a cutting board, prepare

4 goose-neck casings preserved in salt

Turn the skins inside out and, with a paring knife, scrape off the fat. (Reserve the fat; it will be added to the filling.) Put the skins in a bowl of tepid water for 2 minutes to flush away excess salt (if they were preserved in salt). Turn the skins right-side out and set them on a kitchen towel to drain.

Using a large sewing needle and either bright-colored, thin-gauge cotton thread or lamb casings, sew up the wider end of each of the necks. A

finished casing should look like a triangular bota bag. Refrigerate on a plate while you make the filling.



Sewing up the goose neck.

Set on a clean cutting board

½ pound goose skins (from the back, legs, and thighs)

Check the skins for feather stubs or quill tips; if you find any, remove with tweezers. Stack the skins, wrap in plastic wrap, and freeze until solid, about 1½ hours.

While the skins freeze, start the filling. In a large skillet over medium-low heat, melt

8 tablespoons duck fat or unsalted butter

Add

1 small yellow onion, finely chopped

Cook until the onion just starts to soften. If it begins to take on color, lower the heat. Stir in

1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves

Take the pan off the burner and immediately pour in

¼ cup whiskey

Return the pan to medium heat and simmer until the liquid is reduced by a third, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer the onions to a small plate and refrigerate to cool them quickly.

Take the goose skins from the freezer, remove the wrapping, and chop into 1-inch squares. As you cut it, put each one back in the refrigerator to keep it cold. (Keeping the goose skin cold — below 42°F — is critical to the success of the sausages.) Once all of the skin is chopped and cool, run it through the 3/16-inch plate (usually the thinnest) of a meat grinder and into a small bowl. Put the bowl back in the refrigerator.

Replace the die with a ¼-inch plate and with the cooled onion mixture push through

1½ pounds lean goose leg and thigh meat

½ cup dried apricots

Transfer to the bowl of a stand mixer and add the chilled and ground goose skin along with

- **⅓ cup dry milk powder (or soy protein)**
- **2 teaspoons kosher salt**
- **½ teaspoon ground white pepper**
- **½ teaspoon ground mace**
- **¼ teaspoon curing salt #1 (see page 112)**
- **⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper**

Using the paddle attachment, beat the mixture on low speed until well combined. Slowly pour in

- **½ cup ice water**

Mix until the sausage filling is emulsified and of one consistency. If you suspect the mixture is warming up, put it in the refrigerator for 20 minutes to chill before continuing. It’s very important to keep the filling below 42°F.

Put one of the goose necks on a sausage-stuffing mechanism (or by hand with a spoon) and stuff the skin with the filling until it’s seven-eighths full. Massage the meat from the bottom up to compress it and to release any trapped air pockets, and then sew the end shut, just as you did before. Knot the end of the sausage that you just tied with a 12-inch piece of kitchen twine. Making sure you leave enough to use to hang the sausage when you smoke it, wrap the ends of the twine around the knot several times to make a “collar” and tighten up the sausage (you’ll be left with a loop to hang the sausage). Set the sausages on a plate and refrigerate overnight.

DAY 2

Set a smoker to 115°F. With the twine loop, hang the sausages in the smoker while it heats up. Once the smoker reaches 115°F, keep the sausages at that temperature for 1 hour, then increase it to 160°F. Leave the sausages at 160°F until their internal temperature reads 155°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 1½ hours.

Remove the sausages from the smoker and let them sit at room temperature for a few hours, then refrigerate. They’ll last for 3 weeks in the fridge or up to 1 year if wrapped well and frozen.

RESOURCES

Equipment

Most of the recipes in this book call for very basic equipment that requires no more than a trip to the hardware store. Canning pots, glass jars, funnels, and thermometers can all be found for little cost. But if you're planning to make sausages or smoke fish or meat, then you'll need to step up your game with some of the specialty items listed below.

Butcher and Packer Supply Company
248-583-1250
http://butcher-packer.com
Curing chambers, curing salts, dextrose

Lehman's
877-438-5346
http://lehmans.com
Canning supplies

LEM Products
877-536-7763
http://lemproducts.com
Meat grinders, sausage stuffers, smokers, cures, casings

The Sausage Maker, Inc.
888-490-8525
www.sausagemaker.com
Meat grinders, sausage stuffers, smokers, stainless-steel meat hooks, smoke sticks, curing salts, ferment, casings

Ingredients

Many of the ingredients that I call for in this book, such as sloe plums, elderberries, and fiddlehead ferns, are wild, meaning you need to stalk and forage for them yourself. You might also find them in your local specialty market or greenmarket. For example, I get angelica, cattails, elderberries, and ramps from Honey Hollow Farm, in Schoharie County, New York, at New York City's Union Square Greenmarket. Also at the Greenmarket is Berried Treasures Farm, from Cooks Falls, New York, where I get cattails, geraniums, and wild strawberries. You can find many important ingredients online, too. For sausage casings, I recommend checking at your local butcher shop. If they don't have them, they'll still most likely be able to special order them for you.

Heritage Foods USA
718-389-0985
http://heritagefoodsusa.com
Heritage meats

Kalustyan's Spices and Sweets
Marhaba International, Inc.
800-352-3451
http://kalustyans.com
Chiles, powdered pectin, sheet gelatin, spices, wild fennel pollen

Maine Coast Sea Vegetables
207-565-2907
www.seaveg.com
Seaweeds

Mikuni Wild Harvest
866-862-9866
http://mikuniwildharvest.com
Fiddleheads, ramps, truffies, wild mushrooms

Native Harvest
White Earth Land Recovery Project
888-274-8318
http://nativeharvest.com
Wild rice

Ripe to You
559-626-7917
http://ripetoyou.com
Heirloom citrus (Bergamot)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK WAS an incomplete thought until Raquel Pelzel came along and helped me complete it. For her encouragement, I am forever grateful. Her patience, organizational prowess, and ability to coax the best out of this folklore was performed with grace and ease throughout the process. And boy, did we have some fun.

I'd like to give a shout-out to Gabrielle Langholtz, who ran into me one day while I had a bag of foraged Osage oranges and ginkgos in my satchel and decided that Raquel should write something about it in the premiere volume of *Edible Manhattan*. The idea for this book was really born right there on that corner.

Thanks to our agent Angela Wilson, who stuck with this book and never gave up on its quirks and turns.

I would like to thank all of the great talents at Storey Publishing who allowed me to explore these landscapes and let me pursue the book that I wanted to write. Thank you to my editor Pam Thompson, a great champion of the vision; Carolyn Eckert, for her beautiful layout and organic creativity; Doris Troy, for her *very intense* scrutiny of the meaning behind my words; and Alethea Morrison, for trusting in the graphic choices and believing that polaroids and Holga double exposures *actually* would be a good idea.

With awe and wonderment, I need to thank my photographer and friend, Stéphanie de Rougé, who was able to capture through her lens the way I see the world. Your art is a tornado and a whisper.

Thank you to Heather Chontos, our stylist, who has forever given me a new appreciation for the phrase "window dressing."

With immense respect and gratitude, I would like to thank all of the chefs, sous chefs, and cooks I have shared the toils of the kitchen with over the years. I am sure they recognize much of the delicious food we cooked together in these pages, and their many hands have always made the work light and joyful. Jung, Molly, Howard, Rocky, Jackie, Sydne, J-bone, Berty, Denton, and Chris — we sure have put up quite a pantry together. And to Larry, Katy, and Peter, for all the encouragement and great food you shared with me at your stoves.

I will be forever inspired by the magical town of Litmanová, where my daughter's *stara babka* still lives amid the fairytale landscape. Thank you to my wife's family in the "old country" who have always welcomed my curiosity and shared their generous store of knowledge with me. My life in the kitchen has been forever changed by these customs and each of you has given me so much appreciation for the sheer wonder of our sustenance.

And finally, the pleasures of the table were taught to me by my mom and dad, my sister Nicole, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, who always knew not only how to set the table with good food, but with laughter and fine conversation as well. Thank you for all the great meals we have enjoyed together and for guiding me toward a life this wonderful and full of meaning. To all of them, I would like to say that in the end, perhaps "too wild" was just my way of recognizing the great and chaotic nature of it all.

— MATT

THIS BOOK CAME together much like one of Matt's walks through the woods. Many years ago, we had a vision, rambled on, took a few wrong turns, and lost our way once or twice before seeing the trail unfurl before us. Matt and I met through our dear friend Emily Takoudes, who invited our children to her son's birthday party. We ended up working together on a piece about gingko foraging for *Edible Manhattan* magazine (thanks Gabrielle!). We walked over to Fort Greene Park, Matt picking chamomile out of sidewalk cracks, me barraging him with questions.

When Inside Park debuted at St. Bart's Church in Manhattan, I went to the opening to celebrate Matt and the restaurant. His food swept me away. His homemade mustard! The membrillo! The battery of house-cured sausages

and prosciutto! There is a book in here, I thought, and the wheels started turning.

About six months later, I invited Matt to coffee, which turned into us writing a book proposal for a little book about curing and preserving. Little did we know that we were about to embark on a three-year adventure in preserving, gathering, curing, writing — and best yet, eating.

Thank you: to our agent, Angela Miller, for working so hard to find a home for our oddball creation. You, Sharon Bowers, and Jen Griffin stuck by us and stood up for us — thanks for being so persistent and believing in our book.

To our incredibly supportive team at Storey. To Margaret Sutherland and Pam Thompson, for your endless patience and enthusiasm. You guys "got" the book and trusted Matt and me to create it in an organic way and, yes, a bit at our own pace, too. Thank you so much for letting us do our thing, and in turn doing your thing so incredibly well. Your guidance and insights were invaluable all along the way.

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To Stephanie de Rouge, our insanely talented and lovely photographer. It was hard for Matt and me to describe the look of the book, but you somehow understood what the heck we were talking about. Thanks for your incredible eye, climbing on tables, and traveling all over the place to get the right shots. Thanks to Heather Chontos, for bringing props that totally reflected the vibe of the book.

To Matt's wife Katka and sweet daughter Sarah, for putting up with all of the weekend meetings, night meetings, phone calls, and random odds and ends aging in your house (though, I suppose you're used to buckets of fish guts curing in the corner).

To my husband Matt and our two boys, Julian and Rhys, for being so fantastic. I hope a love for the home-cured, preserved, and pickled was

instilled in all of you.

To Matt Weingarten, for seeing the beauty in this world and reminding me to look for it, too.

— RAQUEL

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